TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) IN A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY'S ENGINEERING FACULTY, RECOGNISE AND ACCREDIT KNOWLEDGE ACQUIRED THROUGH WORK EXPERIENCE?

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family for their support:

To my mother and father, who taught me I could achieve anything I set my mind to.

And to my wife and daughter, who sacrificed so much family time so that I could pursue my studies.

I love you.

Abstract:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has become a key component in the South African educational environment because of the need to address past discriminatory practices in education due to the apartheid regime. This study poses the question: To what extent does the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in a University of Technology's Engineering Faculty, recognise and accredit knowledge acquired through work experience? It explores what type of knowledge is assessed and recognised during RPL and what kinds of knowledge, gained at which type(s) of institution(s), are given preference. The study is set against the background of experiential learning theories: the phenomenological learning approach and the situated learning approach. The phenomenological approach views learning as a process of reflection on experience, where learning is facilitated by an educator who guides the learner through the learning process. In the situated learning approach, learning happens through being exposed to actual situations and many complex lessons are learnt simultaneously. Here, the role of the educator is replaced by communities of practice. These approaches to learning are constructivist, where the learner is believed to construct knowledge from interactions within the workplace.

This study takes a constructivist view of knowledge and uses the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) Workplace Learning Strategies Model as a conceptual framework to guide the collection and analysis of data. The research site was selected on the basis of ease of access, and because it is a formal higher education institution. The study involved four assessors and six RPL candidates. The study consisted of applicants whose portfolios could be obtained and who had completed the RPL process at the time of sample selection. Data was collected from a selection of candidates' portfolios, assessor and moderator reports, and interviews with the assessors. The data was plotted against the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) framework. The data from the portfolios was then compared with the data from assessor and moderator reports, and from the interviews with assessors. The study found that the assessors recognised External Codified, Internal Codified and Internal (un-codified) Tacit Knowledge. According to Hopkins and Maglen (2000), Internal Codified and Internal Tacit Knowledge is acquired at the workplace, as opposed to External Codified knowledge which is learnt at formal institutions, such as colleges and universities. Whilst no direct data was obtained on

which type of institution's knowledge gets preference, indirectly ('reading' of the data obtained) it is clear that workplace knowledge is valued.

The study contributes to our understanding of RPL practices and how RPL is understood and implemented in higher education institutions in South Africa. It also provides insights into assessors' readiness to recognise and accept workplace knowledge. Furthermore, this study has operationalized a conceptual framework that may be used to identify the type of knowledge that assessors and institutions recognise and accredit through their RPL practices.

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Acronyms

BIFSA	Building Industries Federation South Africa
HE	Higher Education
HOD	Head of Department
HRPL	Head of RPL unit
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
NQF	National Qualification Framework
POE	Portfolio of Evidence
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SA	South Africa
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines whether assessors in a Higher Education (HE) Institution recognise and accredit workplace learning. The purpose of this chapter is to present the rationale behind the choice of my focal research question, the background to the development of the practice of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa (SA), the history of the institution chosen for the research, and the relevance of the study.

1.2 Focal Research Question

This research was guided by the focal question: To what extent does the Recognition of Prior Learning process in a University of Technology's Engineering Faculty, recognise and accredit knowledge acquired through work experience?

The focus and challenge for this study is not centred around 'who' is conducting RPL for the purposes of awarding credits or specific outcomes based on qualifications, or even 'how', but rather:

- what type of knowledge is being assessed and awarded the formal recognition that the RPL process claims to provide and
- what kind of knowledge, gained at which type(s) of institution(s), is given preference

1.3 Background and Rationale

At the time of conceptualising this study, I was involved in a number of national working groups developing learning materials and qualifications for the electrical trade. During these workshops, a recurring discussion centred on RPL and the implementation thereof. My interest in RPL stems not only from my own involvement in these discussions, but also from my experience as a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) candidate in Higher Education (HE), and as an educator who has been involved in conducting RPL assessments.

As part of the process of explaining my interest in investigating how RPL is being implemented, I utilise two case studies: one conducted at a university and the other at my

place of work, a vocational training centre. Although the two case studies are unrelated, I believe that they do make a case for further investigation into the phenomenon of RPL. The first case study is my own, showing my attempt to access the Master's programme at university. The second case study is about how RPL is conducted within my work environment (as an instructor) of learners wishing to gain access to our formal learning programmes.

Case study 1:

RPL for access into a formal learning programme for a learner who has formal learning.

A learner who holds a Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degree in Post School Education attempts to gain access to the Masters' Programme at a University. The learner is denied entrance by the Education Faculty on the basis that he does not have the prerequisite Honours Degree. The BTech obtained at a University of Technology is recognised as NQF level seven by both the learner's employer and the institution at which it was obtained, but it is not recognised by the university. Based on this, the learner approaches a senior lecturer at the university to clarify access criteria into the programme. The lecturer explains the RPL criteria of the University and assists the learner in accessing the RPL process. The learner is required to develop a Portfolio of Evidence (POE) of his work together with an educational history, and present this to a panel. The learner must also write an assignment (a comparison of two educational papers) and undergo a comprehension-type assessment. After successfully completing the RPL process, this learner is granted access into the Masters Programme at the university.

What is evident from the first case study is that the formal institution was unwilling to recognise formal qualifications from another institution despite these qualifications being in the same learning stream and being registered by SAQA. In not recognising the qualification, this University has denied one of the key principles of the NQF - the Portability of Qualifications between institutions.

Case study 2:

RPL for access into a formal learning programme for a learner who has informal learning.

A worker who has passed Grade 8 at school, requests entrance to a learning programme at an Electrical Vocational Training Centre. The institution provides training towards four different qualifications in the electrical industry: 'General Education and Training Certificate' (GETC): Technical Practice (GETC – NQF Level 1) and National Certificate in Electrical Engineering Levels NQF 2, 3 and 4. The worker, whose designation is that of Special Worker, is authorised to perform certain tasks that an electrician would be required to perform. The organisational structure places the Special Worker one level below that of an electrician. The learner requests RPL for the skills he has obtained via informal learning. These skills have been obtained while working alongside an electrician during the learner's career and his promotion from General Worker to Senior Worker to Special Worker. The learner has attained informal learning within the work environment.

The RPL process is as follows: the learner is required to write a placement assessment which assesses numeracy and literacy skills on a scale between the levels of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and Grade 9. This learner's assessment results place him on the level of Grade 9. The learner gains access to GETC, but obtains no further RPL for the skills that he has obtained through informal learning.

In the second case study, the learner's existing levels of competence with regards to his informal learning were not considered or assessed. The access criteria for the institution's learning programme and more specifically the learners' numeracy and literacy levels were assessed. The learner's informal expertise was not assessed.

Both cases highlight the following questions regarding the implementation of RPL that could be problematic: Firstly, when conducting the RPL process, what types of knowledge and learning are institutions willing to recognise? Secondly, what is the human impact on RPL practices? What impact do the persons who are conducting the RPL assessments have

on the process when they interpret national RPL polices and legislation, institutional policy, and RPL practices?

Whilst this study attempts to deal with the first problem: what knowledge and type of learning are institutions willing to recognise, it must be said that the human impact on RPL cannot be ignored.

1.4 Recognition of Prior Learning

According to Breier (2003: 4), RPL was formally introduced into the South African (SA) education policy framework by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)[1] in 1998.

The SAQA policy document on RPL defines RPL as follows:

> Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner however obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements (SAQA 2002: 7).

And it further describes RPL as:

> To, through assessment, give credits to learning which has already been acquired in different ways (SAQA 2002:17).

What is evident from the above definition and description is the belief of SAQA that learning occurs in different contexts – formal, informal and non-formal. Furthermore, SAQA (2002) explains the process of recognising prior learning with regard to identifying the knowledge and skill of the learner; referencing the knowledge and skill to specific unit standards or outcomes of non-unit standard bearing courses; and then assessing the learner against those unit standards or outcomes. On completion of the assessment, and only if

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[1] Whilst RPL was introduced into SA in 1998, the current RPL legislation is under discussion and review. Some of the proposed changes were discussed at the National RPL Conference: Bridging and Expanding existing islands of excellent practice, 23-25 February 2011, Kopanong Conference Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.

competency is achieved, the learner is credited with the unit standard or qualification for the knowledge, skill and experience that he/she has acquired.

RPL has a more defined role within the context of the NQF in the South African context, unlike other countries (SAQA 2002: 8-11).It has to ensure access, mobility and progression to further education and career paths, as well as redress unfair discrimination in education, training and employment caused by the years of apartheid. There are several reasons why recognition of learning is required, including, but not limited to: personal development, access and progression into a learning programme, fast tracking within a programme, promotion and the changing of career streams. Consequently, I believe that it is fair to assume that RPL has a wide range of benefits for those who have for years been educated outside of the formal education system for any number of reasons.

1.5 The Institution

According to Raju (2004), there are several types of educational institutions that prepare workers for the labour market in SA: technical colleges, technikons (universities of technology) and universities. Each of these institutions has a defined function within the South African education environment:

- Technical colleges offer courses relating to the theoretical training of artisans;
- Universities focus on research and instruction of students in various academic fields;
- Technikons (universities of technology) are intermediaries between technical colleges and universities and their purpose is to provide middle to higher level skills, and also technical and practical knowledge that relate to particular disciplines (Raju: 2004: 2-4).

The development of the university system in SA was as a result of industrialisation after the discovery of the first diamond fields in Kimberley in 1867 and then later, the metallurgic reefs in the Witwatersrand. The emergence of these industries necessitated the need for research and development into the fields of mining and medical care (of for example, the miners working underground). By the early 1980s, the South African Apartheid government had consolidated the university system into a segregated structure consisting of ten white and six African universities. During this period, seven white and five African technikons were

also established. Five of these higher institutions – two white and one coloured university, and one coloured and one white technikon – were in the Western Cape (Cooper: 2012, 150-151). This research focuses on a University of Technology, which was formed through the amalgamation of a coloured technikon and a white technikon in the Western Cape.

The history of this University of Technology dates back to 1920 when one of the institutions (that would later merge into the university), was established as a Technical College. The Technikons Act of 1976 made provision for colleges to offer tertiary education in selected fields of study, and in 1979, the college was legally established as a technikon. Changes to the Technikons Act in 1993 permitted technikons to offer Bachelors', Masters' and Doctorate Degrees in Technology. The Minister of Education's decree in January 2005 merged the two prominent technikons into a University of Technology. (Institutions Website hereafter known as I-Website)

Prior to them merging, both of these technikons had RPL policies, and while one of the institutions implemented the process in a "structured and organised way" (Head of RPL Unit hereafter known as HRPL), the other did so in an impromptu manner. From 2005, the university went about building an RPL unit with the intention of supporting RPL candidates and faculties within the institution.It would assist in the planning of the assessment, confirmation of decisions and, if necessary, the appeals process. In 2007, the RPL unit adopted its current RPL policy. This in itself is a sign of the university's commitment to align with principles of the NQF and the "National Plan for HE in South Africa"[Institution "Proposed Recognition of prior Learning Policy hereafter known as RPL Policy (2007)]

1.6 Formal, Informal and Non-formal Learning

According to Schugurensky (2006), and Walters (1998), formal education is education related to schooling, colleges, universities etc. Non-formal learning is referred to as a short-term, non-certified, planned educational activity that takes place outside of the formal education institution. Informal learning is learning that does not fall under the scope of either of the first two; it often happens as part of a non-educational event and persons are often unaware of the learning taking place. Eraut (2004; 249) explains further that "informal

learning is largely invisible … taken for granted or not recognised as learning, … the resultant knowledge is either tacit or regarded as part of a person's general capability."

1.7 Recognition of Prior Learning at the institution

The institution's RPL policy defines RPL as follows:

> Recognition of Prior Learning is the process of assessing and, where appropriate, accrediting the acquired knowledge, competencies and capabilities of a person, gained in formal, informal or non-formal learning. RPL is conducted with reference to outcomes in a formal qualification, levels on the NQF and, where relevant, particular workplace and social competencies(I-RPL Policy 2007).

Furthermore, the RPL Unit at the institution provides the following clarification of RPL:

- "RPL is an integral part of the promotion of life-long learning. It is a means of creating learning pathways for individuals and is integral to the National Qualifications Framework".(I-Website)
- "RPL is an acknowledgement of the value of an individual's past learning and experience in a variety of contexts. It is a vehicle for addressing past inequities in training and education and provides an opportunity for future development."(I-Website)
- "RPL is a means of broadening access to Higher Education."(I-Website)
- "Both staff and students are offered the opportunity to gain RPL."(I-Website)
- "RPL assessment takes place against current programmes and qualifications" (I-Website)

RPL at the institution is conducted for the purposes of access, advanced standing and exemption at the institution: "Access: A person's skills and knowledge are assessed against the entry level requirements of a qualification"(I-Website). In other words, candidates who have considerable work experience but who do not have the formal requirements to enter a programme, and have sufficient knowledge to match the outcomes of an entire qualification, may be granted access to a higher level programme, although the candidate will not be granted the lower level qualification. "Advanced standing: A person's skills and knowledge are assessed against the learning outcomes of a specific subject or subjects to determine whether the person should be granted credit for and/or exemption from this subject/these subjects" (I-Website). Exemption is applied when candidates have completed similar subjects at other institutions. Where a candidate has substantial knowledge in the area/s, but not sufficient knowledge to match an entire qualification, the candidate may be exempted from completing specific subjects.

However, guidelines governing the awarding of qualifications by the institution – the 'Residency Clause' – states that at least 50% of subjects have to be completed at the institution for a qualification to be awarded. Therefore candidates may not gain RPL for more than 50% of the subjects in a particular programme (I-RPL Policy 2007)(I-Website).

1.8 Relevance of study

The research was conducted with the aim of examining the question: To what extent does the Recognition of Prior Learning process in a University of Technology's Engineering Faculty, recognise and accredit knowledge acquired through work experience? It focuses on a Higher Education (HE) institution and examines the Engineering Faculty, four assessors, HRPL, and six portfolios of RPL candidates. Interviews were conducted with the HRPL and the four assessors. The portfolios were scrutinised for evidence of learning and were compared with the assessment and moderation reports. This study provides a detailed and in-depth illustration of how RPL is being conducted in this HE institution.

This study will have relevance:

- to learners who are attempting to formalise their education through RPL;
- to educators/providers who are looking at implementing RPL within their institutions;
- to assessors who design RPL tools and assess candidates;
- to those individuals who have written or intend to write RPL policies;
- to academics;
- for our understanding of RPL and whether it is achieving its goals; and
- for understanding of how RPL is understood and implemented in an HE institution

1.9 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters:

- The current chapter, which serves as an introductory summary (Chapter 1)
- A literature review which references some of the literature related to the study (Chapter 2)

- An outline of the methodology used during the research (Chapter 3)
- The findings of the study (Chapter 4)
- The conclusion of the thesis (Chapter 5).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

RPL by its very nature raises questions about what constitutes knowledge, learning and experience and the relationship that exists between these concepts. This chapter investigates the literature with regards to what is understood by learning, knowledge and experience. It explores the definition of adult learning and discusses the contexts in which this takes place. It then looks at what formal structures, with specific reference to RPL, are in place and what research has been conducted regarding RPL. Finally, this chapter introduces the conceptual framework used in the study.

Literature on adult education highlights three concepts that are closely related: experience, learning, and knowledge. Understanding and investigating the relationships between these components is a good starting point. Experience can be defined as events participated in by individuals or shared experiences of groups. Morphet (1992: 92) describes the concept of experience as 'the accumulation of events in a person's life' or the manner 'in which people have drawn together and organised a selection of things they have done in their life'. Kolb (1993: 153-155) describes knowledge as a result of an interaction between "objective and subjective experiences in a process called learning" and goes on to describe learning as "a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". Therefore learning can best be described as the act of processing and creating knowledge or modifying behaviour. The view that knowledge can be created from experiences is termed 'constructivism' [Kerka (1997) and Fenwick (2001)]; both the phenomenological and situated learning perspectives are deemed to be constructivist approaches to learning. These concepts are discussed later. This thesis adopts a constructivist view of knowledge.

2.1 Experiential Learning Theories

According to Fenwick (2001: 5), theorists present three leading viewpoints which are dissimilar with regards to the role that experience plays in constructing a learning framework:

1. The phenomenological tradition that suggests that "reflection begins by analysing the learner's way of observing, communicating, thinking and acting";

2. The critical tradition that deals with "critical self-reflection as the central element of adult learning and development"; and
3. The Situated Learning Activity action which stresses the role of "cultural action and its analysis". These theorists criticise those who divorce the "concept of experience from its socio-historical roots and practice".

Furthermore, Fenwick (2001: 9-18) cites the writings of Kolb, Boud and Schon as key exponents of the phenomenological approach. Similarly, she locates the writing of Lave and Wegner (2001) as exponents of the Situated Learning approach. I review the writings of these authors along with Hodkinson & Hodkinson (2003) and others, to investigate these approaches to learning.

2.1.1 Phenomenological Approach

Kolb (1993: 143) states that "Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes" as described by the traditional exponents of education. This process of learning is the process by which knowledge is created, derived and continuously modified by experience. Kolb's model for learning is described as a "tension and conflict-filled process" that is achieved among four modes of experiential learning: a "concrete experience, reflective observation, reflective observation and abstract conceptualization", where the purpose of learning transforms the impulses, feelings and desire of the concrete experience into purposeful action. Similarly, Boud and Walker's (1990) process of personal foundation of experience, "noticing, intervening and reflection in action", as well as Schon's (1996) process of "reflect-in-action, reflect-on-action", all have one purpose. This is the creation of knowledge.

A central concept of the phenomenological approach is the role that experience plays in the learning process. According to Kolb (1993), the learner lives through concrete experience. It is termed concrete because once experiences are created they cannot be changed. The learner could assign a different meaning to the experience later but the actual incident can never be changed. These experiences are the basis for observation and reflection. Similarly, Boud and Walker (1990) agree with Kolb with regards to the role experience plays in the

learning process but they advocate two differences with regard to Kolb's approach: Firstly, even learners in homogeneous groups will view situations differently and secondly, the emotional impact and meaning that the learners will attribute to the experience will be different. The different meanings that the learners assign to their experiences are dependent on their personal and cultural history. Boud and Walker (1990) advocate that these cultural norms and traditional customs (for a specific group), form *perceptual lenses* through which the learners view their experiences. Schon (1996: 19) describes experiences from a point of knowing where "*often we cannot say what we know*"; it is indescribable, yet every practitioner has this tacit, implicit pattern of action that he refers to as *knowing-in-action,* which he explains as follows:

- "There are actions, recognitions, and judgements which we know how to carry out spontaneously.
- We are often unaware of how we learnt to do these things; we simply find ourselves doing them.
- In some cases, we were once aware of the understandings which were subsequently internalised in our feeling for the stuff of action." (Schon, 1996:21)

The learner (Kolb, 1993) (Boud and Walker, 1990) reflects on the experience by asking questions concerning the experience. The learner uses the answers and information obtained in the reflective process to conceptualise his or her understanding. Here, the learners must locate what they observed into sound theories to make decisions and solve problems, hereby creating knowledge. Then the learner is required to actively experiment with what is being learnt and pose questions: What would I do next time? How will the principles I learnt be adapted for future learning? Boud and Walker (1990) agree, in principle, that learning is the process by which a learner reflects, but they regard the learner's 'intent' in the learning process as the foundation for 'self-directed learning' as it encourages the learner to achieve his or her goal. The learner might not be aware of the *intent,* yet it influences the manner in which a learner experiences events. Not being aware of this intent may impose restrictions on learning.

Boud and Walker (1990) believe that in the learning context, learners are required to take notice of what occurs in and around themselves. They must be continuously aware of what is taking place. By being aware, the learner can appreciate more effectively what is happening, which in turn may lead to more effective reflection and interaction. The presence of other learners makes the learning process more complex and unpredictable. It

is evident that learners notice the learning environment, but ignore what is happening to them. Making the learner aware of this aspect can influence the experience, as it is important for the learner to be conscious of and sympathetic towards emotional responses during the learning process. In addition, naming what they notice allows learners to have a degree of control in the learning situation – a situation over which they often believe they have none.

Anderson, Boud and Cohen (2000: 225-226) describe experience-based learning as encompassing formal, informal and non-formal learning. The experience is the foundation and the stimulus which allows the learner to reflect and construct his or her own experiences and knowledge. Learning is an all-encompassing process that is socially and culturally constructed and influenced by socio-emotional contexts. Learning happens when the learner is confronted by something that is personally significant or meaningful (Anderson, et al. 2000: 1)which leads to him or her to reflect on the matter. The principle is based on the premise that learning involves the "whole person (senses and feelings as well as intellect; affect and connation as well as cognition)and this is associated with perceptions, awareness, sensibility and values being invoked"(Anderson, et al. 2000*: 220-223)*. Experiential learning acknowledges the attributes the learner brings to the learning process, both formal and informal. This theory of learning underpins the RPL assumption that valuable learning can happen outside of formal learning institutions.

2.1.2 Situated Learning

According to Fenwick (2001: 34), the understandings that emerge – which assist and allow individuals to participate in a situation are directly linked to the community, tools and activities of that situation. Knowledge and learning are defined as the processes of changing human activity in a particular community. This process of learning in a community in order to participate in that community is termed 'learning in communities of practice'.

Lave (1996: 151) describes learning in communities of practice as being many complex lessons learnt at once. The purpose of learning is best described as: to learn or acquire mastery over the activities that shape and define a particular community of practice.

Wenger (1998) agrees that the learning process is an integral part of our lives, not a specific, separate activity. It need not be a specifically designed activity as "learning happens, design or no design" (1998: 225). Learning is the ability of a learner to negotiate new meanings.

Situated Learning theorists view experience and perspective as important to learning as they shape both what we perceive and what we do (Wenger, 1998). Kerka (1997) purports that "Knowledge is made meaningful in the context that it is acquired" where experts, through experience, amass a rich index of knowledge that can easily be recalled and used.

Wenger (1998) defines the role of learning as follows: Learning is fundamentally experiential and social in nature. It requires the learner to participate socially and to recall past participation; it also requires the learners to be significantly fascinated by the situation to want to participate in it. The impact of the learning will transform the learner's identity, the learner's practices and the learner's ability to participate in the community. Wenger (n.d.) goes on to state that "Communities of practices are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they impact regularly".

What is evident regarding both the phenomenological and situated learning approaches is that learning takes place in a social context and that experience plays a crucial role. Also, both processes require learners to be aware of their surroundings in order to participate effectively.

Evidently different, however, is the manner in which the learner learns- in relation to what is learnt and the context (environment) in which it is shaped. The phenomenological approach views learning as a process where the learner learns through an experience that he or she reflects on, and knowledge is gained through that reflection. This knowledge is then located into sound theories and used to solve problems. Generally what is being learnt is content specific. The learning is facilitated by an educator who guides the learner through the learning process; the task of the facilitator is to assist the learner to understand the intent of the learning process. Noted also, is the view that other learners may make the learning process more complex and unpredictable.

In the situated learning approach, the learner is taught by being active in and exposed to actual situations. Many context-specific and complex lessons are learnt at once - such as how to make a living and how to perform a specific task. The role of the educator is thus replaced by communities of practice and by groups of people who share a concern or passion for something. Learners are taught in the situation in which they are required to perform. What is taught (knowledge, skill and practice), is specifically related to that community of practice.

SAQA (2002: 7) explains that RPL is the recognition of learners' experiences and learning, however obtained. And it is evident that in both the phenomenological and situated learning approaches, learners learn from experience in a particular social context. The knowledge learnt is shaped by the environment and is content-specific. This study is attempts to identify whether or not assessors recognise the experience and the learning that the candidates have acquired in the workplace environment and social context.

2.1.3 Workplace Learning

According to Matthews and Candy (1999: 47-49), a substantial part of lifelong learning happens in the workplace. This learning is classified into two types: learning for traditional work or learning for knowledge work. Traditional work is work that was required in the industrial era; the work was structured around individuals who were focused on specific tasks and required narrow skill sets. Knowledge work, and more specifically, the knowledge required to perform tasks, has become a major asset in organisations. Knowledge work requires workers to work on customer- focused problems, allowing the workers or learners to learn from experience in a particular social context. The knowledge learnt is shaped by the environment – the customer's problem – and is content specific.

According to Fenwick (2001:4) there are two terms that are commonly used in Workplace Learning; "Working Knowledge, to imply cognition and change in a system whether individual or social, mental or embodied…" and "Workplace Learning to imply human

change or growth that occurs primarily in activities and contexts of work; however it is defined and located".

For Fenwick (2001) there are five themes that have relevance:

1. "Situated views of learning and knowledge work": (Fenwick 2001: 6-8) The constructive view is that a learner is believed to construct knowledge from interaction within the workplace. The learner learns through reflection and transforms these experiences into knowledge. Learning is the result of "changing processes of human participation" (2001: 6) in a specific community of practice. Exponents of workplace learning believe that knowledge occurs from the "changing participation in the culturally designed settings of everyday life" (2001: 6) where action and knowledge are interwoven.

   Researchers have proposed various models of workplace learning that deal with: the way learning is entrenched in work; the extent and the manner that learners change in the learning process; the organisation's receptiveness to learning; the manner in which organisations deal with their knowledge (for example serve, protect and recycle) and how the power balance in the workplace affects learning.

2. "The culture and context of workplaces" (Fenwick 2001: 8-9): The following aspects, along with personal attributes, are believed to affect work knowledge: the environment, the ability of the organisation (workplace) to change and the relationships in the workplace that alter perceptions and affect responsiveness to circumstances.

3. "Texts and discourses mediating working knowledge": According to Fenwick (2001: 9-11),a discourse is "a system of norms, values and symbols (images and words) shaping particular beliefs and behaviours. Workers identities, experiences and decisions are affected by these discourses. According to Fenwick, Garrick (1999) proposes four broad discourses that must be understood and challenged as they affect workplace learning. These are: experiential learning, cognition and expertise,

generic skills and human capital. Furthermore, there are studies (Farrel, 2001, and Cope and Kalantis, 2000) that suggest that knowledge is influenced by written and oral communication in the workplace.

4. "Identity and difference as a focus of workplace learning" (Fenwick 2001: 11-13): Adult learning theorists have always believed that learner identities, beliefs, personalities and attitudes affect learning. Researchers are investigating how working environments, relationships and tasks affect the learners' identities, and how this impacts on workplace learning.

5. "Equity and ethics in workplace learning" (Fenwick 2001: 13-14): Workplace learning theorists have often failed to recognise that power struggles and inequalities exist in the work environment. Researchers are now interested in the debates around how the issues of management, power (worker and manager relationships) and gender, impact on the skills of learners and what can be classified as useful knowledge.

Whilst researchers debate and argue the how, what and why of workplace learning and to what extent learning happens, they all agree that learning does happen in the workplace. And whilst these debates are important, they are not central to this study, which seeks to identify if the assessors at the institution at which the research was conducted recognise workplace learning, however it is obtained.

2.2 Knowledge

In addition to working knowledge as defined by Fenwick (2001:4) above, there are other terms used to describe knowledge: tacit, un-codified, codified and explicit.

According to Smith (2001: 312-314), a growing number of companies view knowledge as both a corporate and a personal asset so that when leaving work, employees leave with their knowledge. Individuals possess both explicit and tacit knowledge. The term 'tacit' has been accredited to Michael Polanyi who writes "we know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1966: 4). By this it is generally understood that tacit knowledge is personal knowledge that

remains un-codified, or cannot be codified, by written or symbolic representation (Cowan et al, 2000: 212). For the purposes of this thesis the terms tacit and un-codified, will have the same meaning and are considered interchangeable.

According to Smith (2001: 315) the opposite of tacit knowledge is explicit knowledge. This is described as codified, and obtained via formal education. The terms explicit and codified knowledge are considered interchangeable in this thesis.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Once the study had been defined, a conceptual framework had to be found to make explicit the type of learning that is or is not being recognised by the assessors. When selecting the conceptual tool/method the following aspects had to be considered:

- The tool had to have a component of workplace learning;
- A comparison had to be made between tacit and codified knowledge; and
- The sites of learning had to be able to be identified from the tool.

After consideration of these aspects it was decided to utilise Hopkins and Maglen's (2000: 243-244) Workplace Learning Strategies model. They write that formal education institutions are not the only site where people learn and that learning also happens in the workplace. Furthermore, they explain that organisations are dependent on the following types of knowledge: internal, external, codified and tacit knowledge. Codified knowledge is knowledge that can be written or recorded. Tacit knowledge, in addition to its description in section 2.2, is further defined to mean 'not yet codified' as well as 'un-codified'. The terms internal and external are used to describe where the knowledge resides – internal or external to the organisation.

These knowledge types are plotted on Hopkins and Maglen's (2000) Workplace Learning Strategies Model:

- Area 1: Codified Internal knowledge is knowledge that cannot be applied out of context without substantial modification. It is codified in that it may be recorded in manuals etc.

- Area 2: In contrast, Internal Tacit knowledge is knowledge in action. It has not been written or spoken, and is attained through experience.
- Area 3: Knowledge that is available in the public domain is considered Codified External knowledge. It is written and devoid of specific content.
- Area 4: External Tacit knowledge is derived from experience related to knowledge gained as part of the organisation's technology.

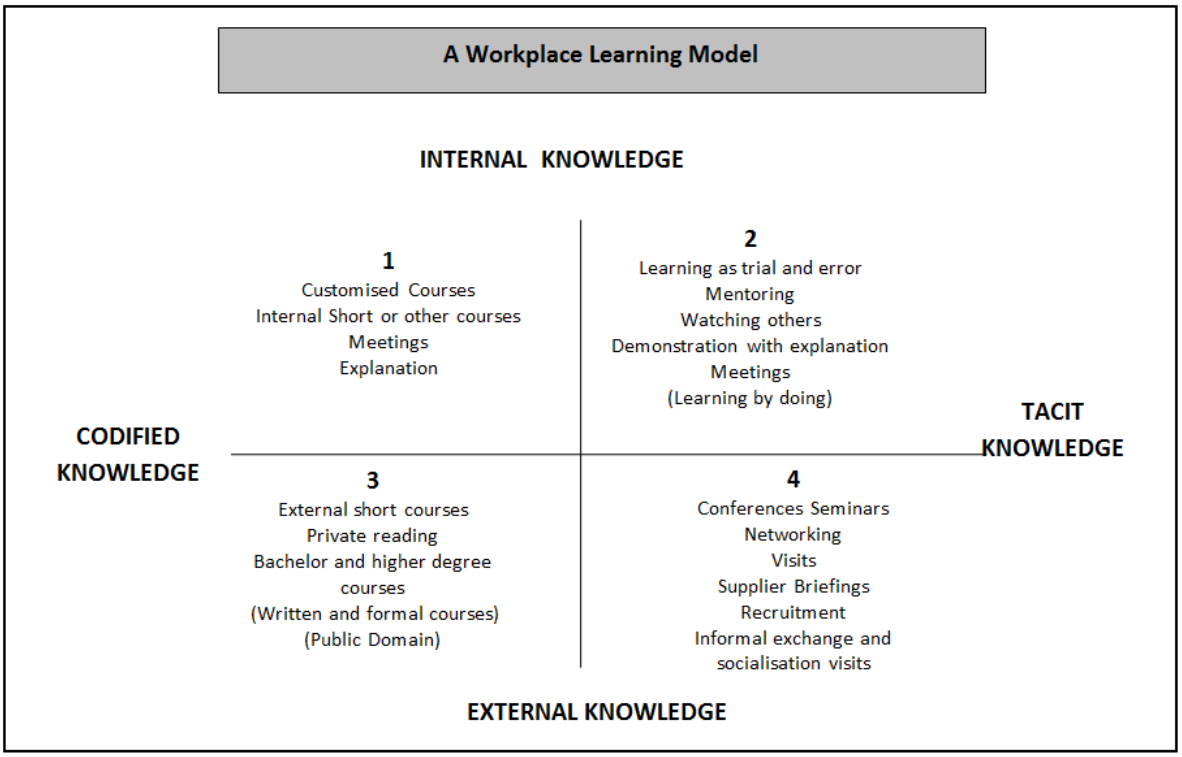


Figure 1: Workplace Strategies Learning Model (Hopkins and Maglen, 2000)

As noted earlier, according to Schugurensky (2006) and Walters (1998), Informal learning is learning that is part of non-educational activity, for example, production at a place of work. In area four of Hopkins and Maglen's model, knowledge is derived from contact with other persons or organisations (and can be considered as that person's or organisational workplace knowledge), and in terms of adult learning and experience theories, candidates who interact with these organisations will learn through their experiences. Hopkins and Maglen (2000: 244) also state that Organisational knowledge (workplace learning) takes place in areas one and two. Therefore, in terms of this study, workplace learning will be represented in areas one, two and four.

Since learning/knowledge in area three is considered as being written and in the public domain, in terms of this study it will be considered as formal learning.

2.4 Models of RPL

SAQA (2002: 13-14) states that the context in which RPL is used will determine the purpose for which it is required. Furthermore, SAQA lists the possible purposes of RPL as follows: personal development, certification without progression, for access or to fast-track progression, or for promotion and career changing. Moll (2004) agrees with SAQA's (2002: 14) proposal of two different types of RPL (for two different target groups), and claims that the first group is more likely to use RPL for *access* into HE by adult learners who want to improve themselves. These learners would generally have some level of professional education. The second type of RPL would serve to redress the second group of learners' needs; these would be learners who have, through informal learning, gained experience in specific areas and now wish to be certificated.

Harris (2000) denotes three types of RPL; a 'Credit exchange', a 'Development model', and a 'Transformation model'. In the Credit exchange model, the learner's experience or knowledge is assessed against a set of objective standards and must reproduce or conform to these standards. In the Developmental model the assessment criteria are broader and the learner's generic expertise is assessed for equivalence. The Transformational model recognises and is more inclusive of non-formal and experiential learning (informal learning) for its own sake, rather than attempting to articulate and match the knowledge with that of the institution.

Breier (2008: 28-33) (2003: 17-25) proposes four perspectives with regards to RPL –

1. The 'Technical/Market perspective' deals with the 'RPL-ing' of informal experience and is referenced against pre-defined learning outcomes;
2. The 'Liberal/Humanist perspective' requires the learning to be matched against generic learning outcomes;

3. The ‘Critical/Radical perspective’ is the recognition of knowledge that is considered different from academic knowledge; and
4. The ‘Radical/Social Constructionist’ vision of RPL, would require the RPL to be based on a system of accepting formal knowledge and prior learning as equivalent.

These four perspectives and their pedagogical implications are highlighted in the table below.

Note: The square brackets and blank boxes indicate that the perspective is visionary rather than reflecting actual forms of practice.						
Perspective	***Conceptualisations of informal experience and learning***	***Associated modes of pedagogy***	***Site***	***Mode of RPL Assessment***	***Type of credit***	***Impact of RPL on curriculum***
Technical / Market	*Some (particularly practical) experience can be equated with specific formal leaning outcomes.*	*Performance*	*Mainly vocational education*	*Challenge tests Examinations Demonstrations Outcomes-orientated portfolios Against specific learning outcomes*	*Specific*	*Mainly practical skills and knowledge. Curriculum unchanged.*
Liberal/Humanist	*Formal and informal experience is different but valuable, for self-development as well as academic purposes. Must be transformed through reflection into learning.*	*Competence: liberal! progressive form*	*Continuing education; (access to) disciplinary courses,*	*Self-orientated portfolios which can be an end in themselves (self-development model) or can be used for assessment of broad equivalence or against generic outcomes*	*In continuing education (self-development model), credit is not sought. The portfolio is an end in itself, In generic outcome model, assessment is for general credit.*	*Curriculum unaffected or rewritten to include generic learning outcomes or curriculum is negotiable.*
Critical/Radical	*Experience and knowledge of the non-dominant is different and has been marginalized. Subjugated knowledges should replace dominant knowledges.*	*Competence: populist, and radical forms*	*Some forms of trade union and feminist, indigenous education*			*[Critique of existing curricula. Promotion of knowledge of or for the benefit of the marginalized.]*
Radical/Social Constructionist (Trojan Horse/ 'optimally social inclusive')	*[Seen as valuable, socially constructed horse! and power-laden]*	*[Competence; social constructionist]*		*[All forms + critical portfolio development]*	*[Specific, general and access]*	*[Curricula are critiqued and change is advocated. In the meantime, access to and credit against existing curricula is supported.]*

Table 1: Perspectives on experiential learning and RPL and associated modes of pedagogy Breier (2003: 25)

Breier (2008: 28-33) (2003: 17-25) describes "Technical/Market" as RPL that is performed where "practical experience" is assessed against "specific outcomes". Similarly the

Institution RPL for "Advanced standing" is described as matching "a person's skills and knowledge against the learning outcomes of a specific subject or subjects" (RPL policy). Other similarities in this regard are the tools used by the assessors and the assessment tools described by Breier (2008). The assessment tools generally used for this type of RPL, are the challenge test and portfolios.

The "Liberal/Humanist" an the Institution "access" model of RPL can be equated, as both versions of RPL provide the learners with access into learning programmes (continuing education and access to disciplinary courses [Breier (2008: 28-33) (2003: 17-25)].The assessment assesses broader competence in terms of the learner's ability to cope or function at the level required and "self-orientated portfolios which can be an end in themselves".

In this study Breier's (2008: 28-33) (2003: 17-25) "perspectives on experiential learning and RPL and associated modes of pedagogy" will be utilised as a model to reference and analyse:

- The purpose of the RPL with regards to the type of perspective from which it is being conducted (i.e. Technical/Market or Liberal/Humanistic etc.);
- The site at which the learning has occurred. (i.e. Vocational, or continued education etc.); and
- The mode of RPL assessment - the assessment tools that are used to assess the learners.

2.5 Research in RPL in SA.

According to Ralph (2011) there is an ever-increasing amount of research that reflects that RPL is not achieving its promise of redress. Furthermore he describes research that explores RPL with regards to "specialisation of practice" (2011:7), including a small number of research projects conducted within HE institutions and places of work, by Ballim, Omar, and Ralphs in 2000 and then later, a number of larger projects intended to recognise and certificate workers in a number of sectors- by SAQA (2007), and Volbrech, Tisani Hendricks and Ralphs in 2006. These have been divided into three specialised type practices: 'RPL for Credit', "RPL for Access' and 'RPL in Curriculum'' (2011:8-10).

'RPL for Credit' is a form of "credit exchange" (2011:8) where practical skills are assessed and certificated. 'RPL for Access' is described as assessment of the "mega-cognitive and reflective capabilities" essential to succeed in HE, and 'in the Curriculum' (2011:10) is described as RPL that recognises learning that happened in the workplace as part of the course.

Breier (2011: 200) contends that RPL in SA has been and published, but these publishing's should be considered out of proportion, with the amount of research conducted on RPL. As there has been limited implementation since these publications have been written around a small number of interventions with limited success. Almost all of the research has been "qualitative, introspective and micro focused."(Breier, 2011: 201)

Breier (2011: 202-205) states that "Research to develop policy" undertaken by Ballim*et al* (2000), who researched the access to HE, and Mukoro (2010), who researched the beginnings of RPL polices, placed RPL origins with the South African Human Research Council and not with the trade unions and its alliance partners as previously argued.

"Research to conceptualise and guide practice": Breier (2011: 205- 208) claims that Michelson (1996, 1997) argued that RPL "challenged the authority dominant, academic forms of knowledge" and later in (2006) reviewed the RPL practices in SA. Whilst local academics argued strongly for the implementation in HE, Breier (1997, 1999) wrote of complications in the recognition of informal knowledge in formal HE. Khanyile (2000, 2005) focused on developing an RPL model for nursing. Harris in her empirical research between 1996 and 1999, was involved in two research projects in two different HE institutions (one of which amalgamated into the University of Technology where this study was conducted.) The research looked at access (into programmes) and feasibility. Secondly, Harris looked at conceptualisations of RPL and noted four differences in types of RPL, which are discussed in Models of RPL (section 2.4).

Furthermore, Breier (2011:208-213) writes that research has been conducted to "monitor and quantify implementation" and reports that the research conducted by Lugg*et al* (1998)

inside the workplace – assessing workers against unit standards - was not advantageous to the workers. Furthermore she states that Cooper's (1998) research on workers' experience with regards to RPL within a trade union has the possibility of separating rather than uniting workers.

Research conducted at the university by Degraff-Mazzaza (2010) posed the following questions:

1) What are the similarities and/or differences in knowledge claims made by RPL applicants and the knowledge claims recognised by academics in the RPL process for access into the BTech degree in Project Management at the institution?
2) How valid is RPL as a means of access into the BTech Project Management programme at the institution?

The research concluded that RPL was a valid process, with some of the RPL candidates completing their studies and graduating. The assessors during the RPL assessment were looking for a broader type of knowledge than institutional (theory) knowledge. The knowledge that the assessors saw as important was "the ability to cope with studies in HE." (Degraff-Mazzaza, 2010: 100)

Whilst I conceptualised my study prior to reading the findings of Degraff-Mazzaza's (2010) study, there is an overlap in our studies. I attempted to codify the "broader knowledge" that Degraff-Mazzaza claims has been recognised by assessors, by plotting this knowledge against the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) Workplace Learning Strategies Model.

Chapter three goes into further detail on how the research study was conducted and how both Breier's (2008: 28-33) (2003: 17-25) "perspectives on experiential learning and RPL and associated modes of pedagogy" and Hopkins and Maglen's (2000: 243-244) Workplace Learning Strategies model were used to analyse the findings.

2.6 Summary

This chapter briefly reviewed the literature on experiential learning with regards to phenomenological and situated learning, where knowledge is believed to be constructed

through experience. It examined how learners learn in the workplace. Breier's (2008: 28-33) (2003: 17-25) "perspectives on experiential learning and RPL and associated modes of pedagogy" will be utilised as a model to reference and analyse the purpose of RPL. Hopkins and Maglen's (2000: 243-244) Workplace Learning Strategies Model will be used to identify the type of knowledge being assessed as well as considering the institution where it was learnt. The next chapter will discuss how Breier's (2008: 28-33) (2003: 17-25) and Hopkins and Maglen's (2000: 243-244) models are utilised in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to broadly outline the methodological approach to the research study. It will also clarify how data was collected and analysed to answer the research question: To what extent does Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in a University of Technology's Engineering faculty recognise and accredit learning and knowledge acquired through work experience? The chapter outlines how the research site was chosen, how the participants in the study were identified and selected, and how the data was collected and analysed.

This project is a qualitative research project. According to Maxwell (1996: 17-20) the strengths of qualitative research lie in its inductive approach. There are five purposes that qualitative research is suited for: "Understanding the process, the meaning, the particular context, identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and developing casual explanations."

In terms of this study and with reference to Maxell (1996), qualitative research was chosen for the following reasons:

- To 'understand the meaning' of RPL for the assessor by understanding what type of knowledge is viewed by the assessor as important; to consider what the assessor's beliefs are with regard to workplace learning and whether the assessor sees one type of teaching as being more important than another – university teaching as opposed to workplace teaching.
- To 'understand the context' in which the assessor assesses and the influence that the context has on the assessment; the site at which the learning has occurred (vocational, or continued education etc.); the purpose of the RPL with regards to the type of perspective from which it is being conducted; and, the impact that the faculty departments (and the assessors) context has on the RPL process.
- To 'understand the process' of assessment with regard to the type of learning being assessed when RPL is conducted for the awarding of credits; the assessment tools used; the type of knowledge that is being assessed and awarded the formal

recognition that the RPL process claims to provide; and the type of institution from which the learning/knowledge being assessed was obtained.

3.2 Site selection and access

As discussed in Chapter 1, at the time of conceptualising this study I was involved in a number of national working groups. During lunch time activities at these workshops, delegates tended to discuss and debate RPL and its implementation. There was one recurring comment that was of particular interest to me during these discussions. This was that RPL is ideally suited for implementation in the technical trades or engineering fields, yet very few of the delegates at these workshops stated that they were implementing RPL. The common reasons provided were lack of resources, time, assessment tools and so on.

My decision for conducting research into the engineering field was threefold: Firstly, the notion that RPL was ideally suited to the technical trades, yet was apparently not being implemented, encouraged my interest in exploring this more closely. Secondly, during my courses of study, I came across no examples of RPL being conducted and researched in the engineering fields (the examples used were predominantly in non-technical environments. Khanyile 2000 & 2005, Cooper 2005, Breier 2003 & 2008, Degraff-Mazzaza's2010).
Thirdly, I believed that my experience and involvement in technical training in various engineering disciplines (Mechanical, Electrical and Construction-related engineering fields) would assist me during the study. Both the site and the contact person was discovered while surfing the internet for sites conducting RPL in the engineering fields.

3.2.1 The Institution

The institution is a University of Technology in the Western Cape, South Africa (SA) and has six faculties: Applied Science, Business, Education and Social Science, Engineering, Health and Wellness Sciences and Informatics and Design. For reasons already explained, the focus was on the university's Faculty of Engineering.

This faculty offers a wide array of engineering disciplines, incorporated in nine departments, such as: Built Environment, Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Clothing and Textile

Technology, Electrical Engineering, Extended Curriculum Programme, Industrial and Systems Engineering, Maritime Studies and Mechanical Engineering. The University's Engineering Faculty aims to incorporate education and research into a cohesive "industry responsive education" system (I-Website). The faculty also participates in a number of regional, national and international research programmes and partnerships in order to provide its students with the opportunities of international experience.

The next step in the process was to gain access to a site, to meet with the HRPL to enquire about access to the institution as a possible research site as well as to discuss the purpose of the study. At the meeting on 5 August 2009, I was instructed to write a letter (see Appendix **A**) to the Senior Professor and Chair of Postgraduate Studies asking for access to the institution and for clearance from the institution's ethics committee to conduct research within the institution's engineering faculty. Access to the site was granted on the 20 October 2009

3.2.2 The Site

The final selection of the site for this study was made once a sample of four assessors and six candidates that could be verified (see 4.4 Sample selection). Accordingly, the study was conducted at various departments within the University of Technology's Engineering Faculty. These departments were: Built Environment, Civil Engineering (Survey), Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering.

3.3 The order of the research

According to the HRPL, RPL begins when RPL candidates believe that they have the same (or more) knowledge and skill than they would have learnt, should they have attended classes. These candidates contact either the RPL Unit or the department that offers the course and request that they be given recognition for the learning they believe they already have achieved. Whilst the candidate might have contacted different persons or departments initially, all candidates were referred to the RPL unit to begin the process. The RPL Unit requests the candidate to submit a curriculum vitae (CV) and the relevant application forms. The HRPL reviews these documents and refers the RPL application and the candidate to the

relevant department. The candidate then meets with the assessor to discuss the RPL process (see section 4.1 the institution's RPL process-initial meeting), time frames and the possible RPL award. The assessor then guides the candidate in the development of a portfolio of evidence. Once the portfolio is completed, the candidate submits it for assessment. The assessors assess the portfolio by comparing it to the assessment outcomes that would be required in the area for which the RPL was requested. After the evaluation process is completed, the RPL application, portfolio and award is submitted to the RPL Unit -- to draft a report and submit the RPL award to the Senate for final approval

In terms of the research, the process followed by the institution is as follows: the learner produces the portfolio, it moves from the learner to assessor, the assessor evaluates the portfolio and gives it to the HRPL who submits the final report to the senate for approval.

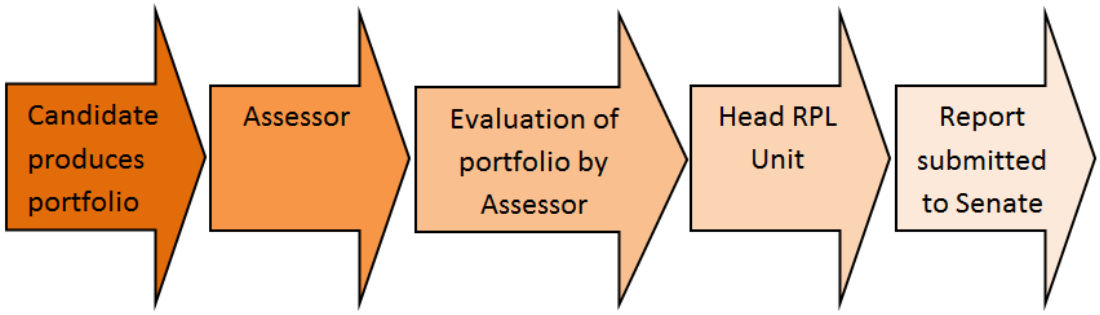


Figure 2: The portfolio flow

In order to select a sample and to identify the type of learning that has been recognised, the research would have to begin at the end, as all the candidates in the sample would have had to be RPL'd. It was thus decided that it would be best if the research process moved backwards through the RPL process, starting at the RPL award and following the process as illustrated in Figure 3.

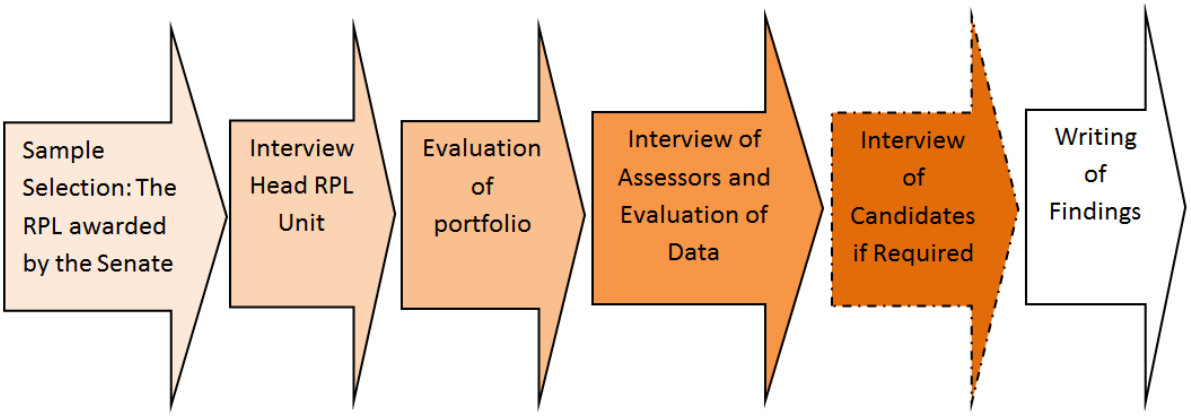


Figure 3: Research Process

3.4 Sample Selection

The initial research proposal indicated that the sample would be chosen according to the following criteria:

- Ten learners and their portfolios would be evaluated, along with the corresponding assessors.
- Preferably at least fifty per cent of the candidates should have had little or no formal learning in the qualifications being assessed. The reasoning for this criterion was that it would be simpler to identify if the assessor was unbiased with regards to the type of learning that the candidates had undergone – more specifically, their workplace learning.
- All the learners had to be awarded some form of RPL, whether it was for access or advanced standing.

This proposal was sent to the institution's HRPL who indicated that the proposed selection criteria for the sample were not practical since there were very few RPL candidates in the field of Engineering at the institution.

The selection requirements were therefore amended, and all applicants who had completed the RPL process at the time of sample selection were included. The sample group included four assessors and eight candidates. All eight candidates participating in the study had been awarded some form of RPL, but only two of the candidates had no formal learning on the basis of their RPL application.

After potential participants were identified, a process of obtaining the assessors' and candidates' willingness to participate in the study began. The assessors and the candidates were contacted telephonically to determine if they were willing to participate by undergoing an interview. The RPL candidates were also asked if they would grant permission for their portfolios to be evaluated. The response was as follows:

- All four of the assessors agreed to be interviewed.
- Six candidates agreed to their portfolios being evaluated and used in the study.
- Four of these six candidates agreed to being interviewed whilst two candidates indicated that their work commitments did not allow them time for the interviews.
- Two of the candidates were not contactable and neither were their portfolios available for evaluation (one candidate resided in Namibia and the other was not contactable.)

On review, it was decided that candidate interviews would not be required as the study's focus was not on the learner, but rather on the assessor's recognition of the learner's evidence. Information obtained from interviewing the candidates would not add value to the study.

3.5 Broader Research Plan/Design

A number of data-gathering methods were used during the course of the study - the reasons for which are explained in this chapter. These methods include documentary evidence (such as the candidate's documentation – portfolio, CVs etc.) and institutional documentation (such as the RPL policy and the assessment reports etc.) Another primary source of data-gathering was the interviews conducted with the relevant role players (assessors and HRPL). The internet (the institution's own website) was also used to gather information. These data-gathering methods will be discussed in terms of: background; attempts to identify what knowledge the candidate put forward in his or her portfolio, the Assessor's and Moderator's reports, and interviews.

3.5.1 Background

The portfolios were obtained from the HRPL after permission was granted to use the institution as a research site. After evaluation of the portfolios, and after the interview questions had been devised, it was decided to conduct an exploratory interview with the HRPL.

The purpose of this interview was firstly, to gauge the size of the study and whether a sample size was required. This was found not to be a requirement as the number of candidates who completed the RPL assessment was so small that consideration had to be given to using all the candidates in the study. Secondly, the interview with the HRPL offered the opportunity to gain an understanding of the institution's RPL process and history (for example, to ascertain how long RPL has been in practice at the institution and the level of commitment of the assessors to the process.) Finally, the interview dialogue provided information from which further questions for the assessor (such as what the RPL access criteria in the assessor's specific department are) could be formulated.

A total of five interviews were conducted – one with the HRPL and four with the assessors who assessed the RPL candidates. The content of the interviews differed: the interview that was conducted with the HRPL was for the purposes of understanding the RPL process and developing questions that could be used to ask the assessors.

The institution's RPL policy was used to obtain information about its RPL process, the type of assessment tools the RPL Unit proposes, and the type of RPL that the institution offers i.e. Advanced standing, Access or Exemption.

The institution's website, which serves to market and promote the institution to potential learners, was used to obtain background and historical information about the institution. It provides information with regards to the Engineering faculty and its departments. It also provides insight into the institution's RPL process and how the RPL process is marketed to prospective candidates.

3.5.2 Attempt to identify what Knowledge the Candidate put forward in Portfolio

The exploratory part of the data collection process was to evaluate the portfolios in order to understand the RPL process, understand the RPL award, and develop questions to pose to the assessors and HRPL regarding the RPL process, RPL award and RPL documentation. The information derived from this process was used to formalise the interview questions.

Next, the candidate's complete portfolio was examined to ascertain: the candidate's educational history (for example; qualification, courses attended, etc); work history; the type of work the candidate performed and the type of evidence presented in the portfolio. The purpose of this examination of the evidence was to allow the researcher to compare the knowledge identified in the portfolio with that prioritised by the assessor (as it emerged through the interviews, the assessment and moderation reports).

3.5.3 Assessor Views

Examination of the assessment and moderation reports enabled identification of the type of assessment tools used in the RPL assessment of the candidates and the type of evidence (of learning) that the assessor deemed important enough to describe in the assessor and moderator reports.

The purpose of the assessor interviews was to elicit information about the RPL process within the different departments of the Engineering Faculty; the type of knowledge and learning valued by the assessors and specific questions relating to the candidates' portfolios. Copies of the interview questions may be perused in the appendices. For the generic interview questions, see Appendix C and for the specific interview questions for the assessor see Appendix D.

Furthermore, interviews with the assessors were conducted to make explicit the following aspects:

- The assessor's RPL background, i.e. length of time the assessor had been conducting RPL and whether the assessor had received any formal training in this regard.

- The RPL process and whether the department followed the process as prescribed by the RPL Unit: the language used in the process and whether a candidate could use workplace terminology without being penalised for using non-institutional or less formal terminology.
- The type of assessment tools used: Was only a portfolio used or were there other assessment tools, such as challenge tests and written assessments?
- The type of knowledge the assessor values: formal, non-formal or informal learning and whether the assessor sees one type of institution's teaching as being more important than another.
- The type of learning or knowledge that the assessor believes is best RPL'd, or that which cannot be RPL'd.
- The assessor's thoughts and beliefs on the RPL process: Does the assessor have confidence in the process or does the assessor believe the process is flawed?

Questions were derived from the interview with the HRPL, the candidate portfolios and the research question. A battery of interview questions was derived for the assessors. Questions that were specific to the portfolio were tailored for each assessor, based on their candidate's/candidates' portfolio/s (For the interview schedule see appendix F).

3.6 Tools for Analysis of Data

3.6.1 Analysis Step One: Designing interview questions

The assessor's moderation report, the candidate's academic record, employment history (section of the CV) and the exit outcomes of the qualification or subject for which the candidate was awarded RPL, were glued to large (A1) pages. (See Appendix E). The documents were then cross-referenced against each other to determine how the outcomes of the qualification or subjects linked to the assessor's report, the candidate's work experience, the qualifications obtained and the courses attended. The information derived from this process was used to formalise questions such as: How much work experience is required for access to RPL? How much evidence is sufficient? More specific questions were also asked. For example: How correct is it to RPL a candidate on a course that he or she has failed?

3.6.2 Analysis Step Two: Understanding the candidate's history

Further examination of the portfolios enabled identification of:

- The candidate's educational history such as the candidate's level of qualification, and courses attended.
- The candidate's work history with specific reference to the number of years' experience in the area for which RPL was sought, and the number of companies where the said experience was gained;
- The type of work the candidate performed; and
- The type of evidence presented as part of the portfolio.

The data obtained from this process is presented in Table 5, Chapter 4, Section 4.2.

The evaluation of the portfolio prompted further questions with regards to the evidence of assessment that were not part of the initial research question:

- How much evidence is sufficient? (One candidate's portfolio contained 50 pages and a few photographs while other portfolios contained more than 300 pages with numerous examples of projects completed)
- How authentic is the evidence? (None of the copies was certified and there was no proof that examples of work submitted was the learner's own)

3.6.3 Analysis Step Three: Plotting the candidates evidence

The data collected during the portfolio evaluation (step 2 of the analysis) was referenced against the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) Organisational Learning Model. As noted in Chapter Two, Hopkins and Maglen's (2000: 243-244) organisational learning model describes four areas of knowledge:

- Area 1: Internal (to organisation). Codified knowledge, which is knowledge that is written or organised explicitly in documents, and that cannot be applied out of context without substantial modification. (Customised courses, internal, short or other courses; meetings and explanations.)
- Area 2: In contrast, Internal (to organisation); Tacit (Un-codified) knowledge, which is knowledge in action. It cannot be written or spoken, and it is attained through

experience. (Learning as trial and error, mentoring, watching others, demonstrations with explanation, meetings or learning by doing.)

- Area 3: External (to organisation); Codified knowledge which is available in the public domain. It is written and devoid of specific content. (External short courses, private reading, Bachelor and post-graduate degree courses, written and formal courses.)
- Area 4: External (to organisation) Tacit (Un-codified) knowledge which is derived from experience related to knowledge gained as part of another organisation's technology. (Conferences, seminars, networking, visits, supplier briefings, recruitment, informal exchanges and socialisation visits)

Hopkins and Maglen (2000: 244) state that organisation learning (workplace learning) takes place in Area 1 and Area 2. Area 4 knowledge is derived from contact with other persons or organisations (and can be considered as that person's knowledge/organisational workplace knowledge), but in terms of adult learning and experience theories, candidates who interact with these organisations will learn through their experiences. Therefore in terms of this study, Areas 1,2 and 4 were considered workplace learning. Area 3 has been described as learning or knowledge that is written and in the public domain, therefore in Hopkins and Maglen's study, Area 3 was considered formal learning and not workplace learning.

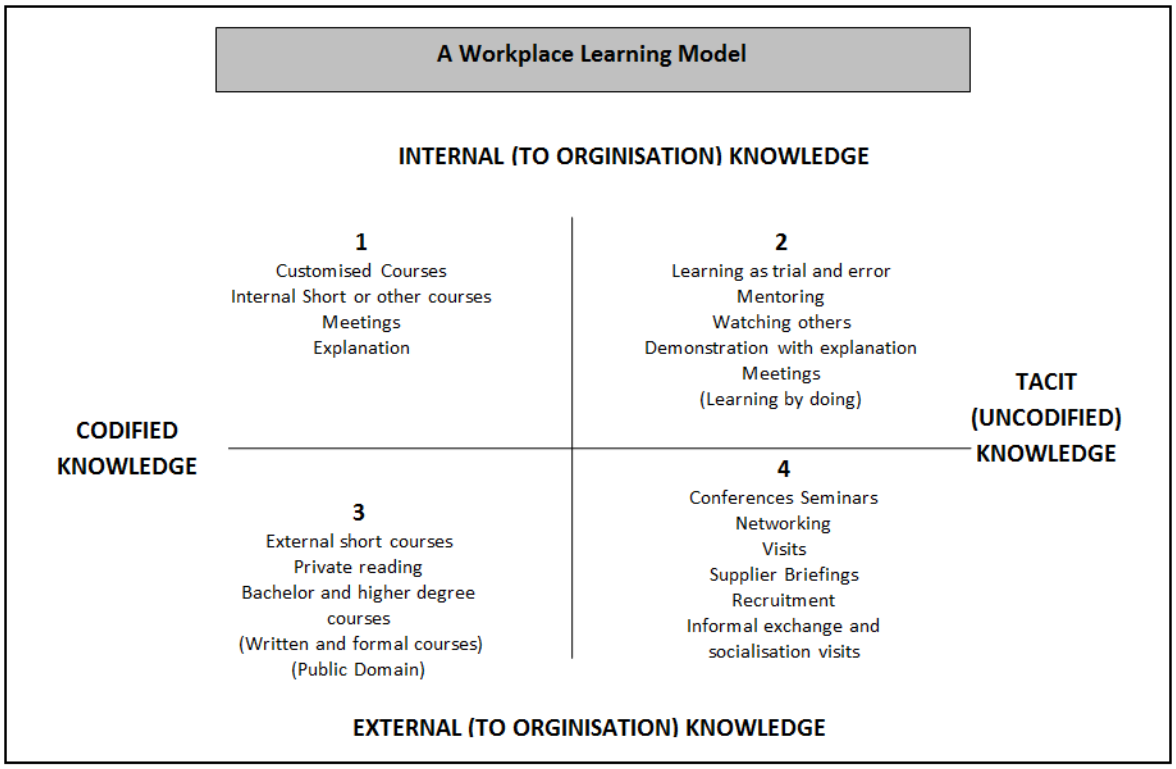


Figure 4: A Workplace Learning Model - Modified for this study

Using the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) Workplace Learning Model, the type of knowledge was categorised into one of the four areas, as previously defined (Internal Tacit knowledge, Codified External knowledge, etc.).Categorising and plotting the knowledge was to provide a method of referencing, and to compare the evidence in the portfolio with the type of knowledge preferred or valued by the assessor during the RPL process, thus ascertaining whether workplace knowledge was being recognised or not (research question).

The learner's portfolio (assessment evidence) was referenced against the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) model using the following criteria:

- The number of instances[2] the evidence occurred in the portfolios was counted as no form of weighting (or referencing) could be determined for weighting evidence against the learning model.
- Years of experience and the number of employers the candidate had worked for was noted as separate items on the grid. This decision was made with the belief that

[2] This is clearly not a quantitative study; however, a loose form of 'counting' of instances of particular kinds of evidence was necessary.

learners who have worked for various employers have accessed a greater variety of experience, and with more experience there are more opportunities to learn.

- All evidence relating to experience, learning and references of work in the following documents were counted: a CV, certificates, portfolios, work records, actual proof of work and other relevant documents.
- Consideration was given to not mention evidence twice.

The portfolios and all relevant documents were evaluated and plotted on the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) grid utilising the following criteria:

Evidence	**Rationale**	**How Categorised**
Short Courses	There had to be the logo of the company where the candidate had worked on the certificate, and the date of the certificate had to correspond with the candidate's employment record.	Internal Codified
Customised Courses	Courses were considered customised if they were designed to aid the delegates to do their work.	Internal Codified
Explanations	Where explicit proof existed that someone within the company had explained aspects of work to the candidate so that the candidate could learn.	Internal Codified
Meetings	Proof of the meeting had to indicate that the meeting was internal to the company, with no external parties present.	Internal Codified
External Short Courses	Courses were considered external short courses when the following criteria were met**:** courses not containing the company's logo; or if it could be proven that the candidate had received training from the company prior to employment, or it was not considered a customised course.	External Codified
Bachelors and Higher Degrees / or formal knowledge	Evidence was considered formal knowledge when the candidate had attended a college or university and received education or was receiving education at a level higher than Grade 12. No formal schooling was considered as candidates were asking to be RPL'd at levels higher than the access criteria (Grade 12). A distinction was made between completed and partially completed degrees / formal schooling.	External Codified
Employment and Experience	Because Internal Tacit knowledge is derived from experience related to knowledge gained as part of the organisation's technology, all employment linked to the field of study for which RPL was requested, was noted. Therefore, each new employment entry was listed and noted, but cognisance had to be taken of where candidate offered many years of experience with the same employer (for example, 2 employers but twelve years of experience). The date of commencement of experience was calculated as the date at which evidence first existed in the portfolio that the candidate had worked in the relevant field.	Internal Tacit (Learning by doing)
Projects:	As Internal Tacit knowledge is derived from experience related to	Internal

Note: A project ordinarily involves research or development that is planned to achieve an outcome and can be constituted by teams within a workplace to achieve a specific outcome. Projects would generally involve interaction with customers and sub-contractors, meetings etc.	knowledge gained as part of the organisation's technology; it was assumed that all candidates who provided evidence of projects were at some stage/s, during their working careers, exposed to mentoring. They must have performed product demonstrations/explanations, watched others during work, participated in meetings, and learnt by trial and error. Projects by their very nature allow people to learn from experience.	Tacit (Learning by doing)
***Projects**:*	Because External Tacit knowledge is derived from experience related to knowledge gained as part of the organisation's interaction with customers and sub-contractors etc., it was assumed that the candidates that submitted projects had experienced, inter alia, the following: networking, visits, supplier briefings, recruitment, informal exchanges and socialisation visits. (As very few projects do not make use of outside contractors and suppliers, it was assumed that each example of projects listed required the candidate to perform some/all of these actions).	External Tacit***;*** (Information exchange due to socialisation)
Networking:	As External Tacit knowledge is derived from experience related to knowledge gained as part of the organisation's interaction with other organisations, it was assumed that the candidates who submitted evidence of networking/socialisation visits not related to a project were networking. Letters, that were not reference letters reflecting the conclusion of employment, were regarded as networking.	External Tacit***;*** (Information exchange due to socialisation)

Table 2 – Portfolio Based Evidence Evaluation criteria

The data derived from this process was referenced and recorded against the Organisational Learning Model of Hopkins and Maglen (2000). The results of this process can be found in Chapter 4, Section 4.3, Figure 8.

3.6.4 Analysis Step Four: Plotting the assessor and moderator reports

While the examination of the portfolios enabled me to identify the types of knowledge presented for assessment, it provided no clear evidence of the type of knowledge that the

assessor deemed important, since the evidence was so varied. In addition, the assessor, after assessing the evidence only highlighted certain aspects in the assessment moderation reports. Therefore the assessment and moderation reports (Appendix G) were evaluated to identify the types of knowledge that the assessor deemed important to describe (to the HOD, RPL office and the senate) in support of the RPL judgement. So, out of all the evidence in the portfolios the assessors only emphasised certain aspects of it. It can therefore be assumed that the assessor placed more value on those aspects.

Using the same process and evidence criteria as in section 3.6.3 Analysis Step three, the data from the assessor and moderator reports was evaluated and plotted on the Organisational Leaning Model of Hopkins and Maglen (2000). The results of this process can be found in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2, Table 6: RPL tools as described in the assessment and moderation reports. Table 6 and Figure 9

3.6.5 Analysis Step Five: Interviews and Transcription

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and checked for accuracy (transcripts of the interviews can be seen in Appendix H). In order to identify, compare and contrast common trends in the interviews, the transcripts were pasted into a computer spread sheet and colour-coded – blue for interviewer and black for assessor – for ease of reading. Using the programme's "find" feature (Microsoft Excel 2010), key word searches were done using key words such as "tools", then an "X" was placed in the corresponding column. The column headings included: RPL & Tools, Process, Knowledge, Evidence and Learning and so on.

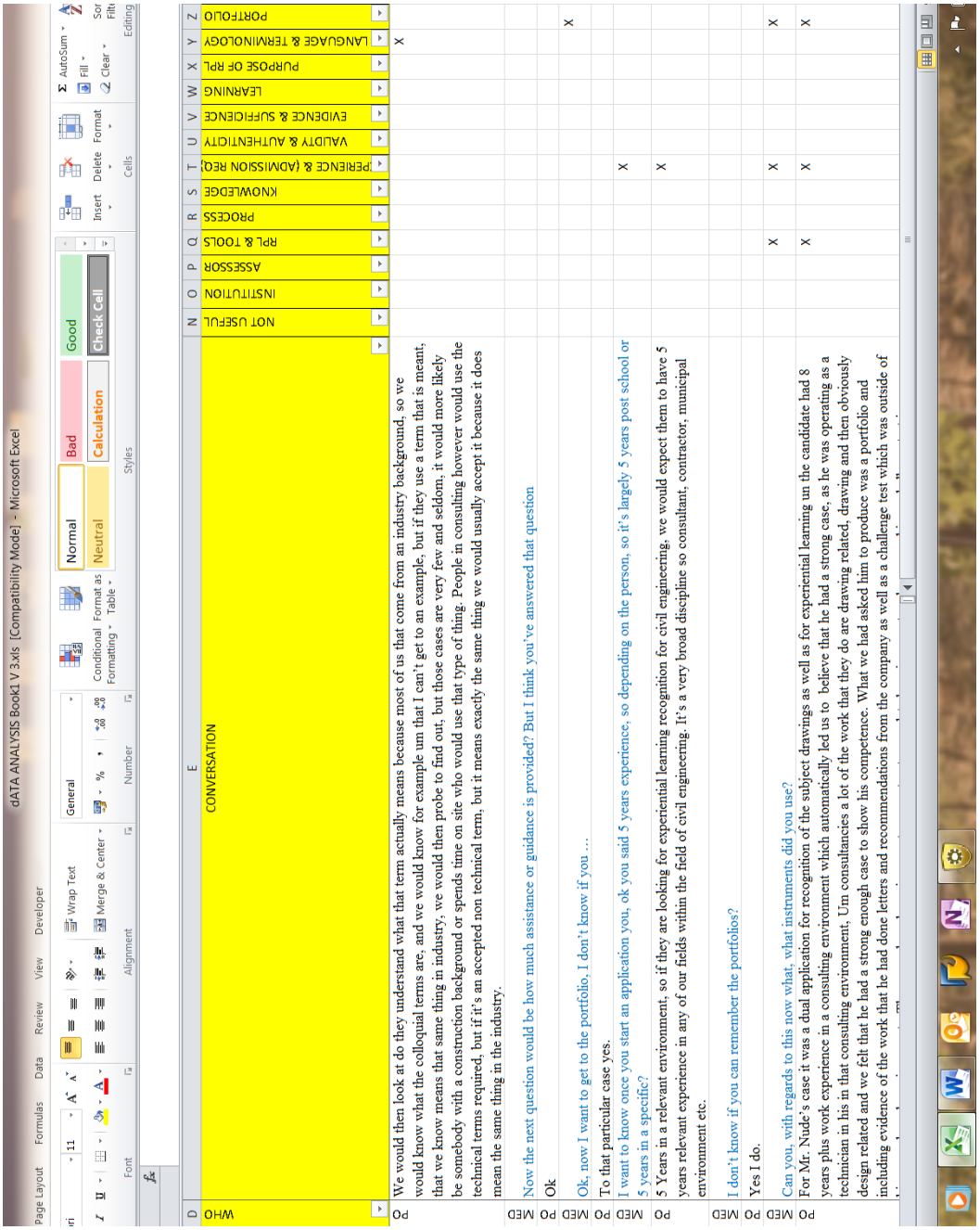


Figure 5: Coding Interviews

The entire spread sheet was printed and proofread to ensure that the correct rows and columns had been marked (with an 'X') and that data not identified in the key word search did not go unnoticed. Changes were made to the spreadsheet, once they were identified from a careful reading of the data. The information on the main spread sheet was sifted into the relevant areas i.e. all rows containing information relevant to a certain aspect (for example RPL & Tools) were placed into secondary spread sheets. These were then printed and manually evaluated for more specific trends.

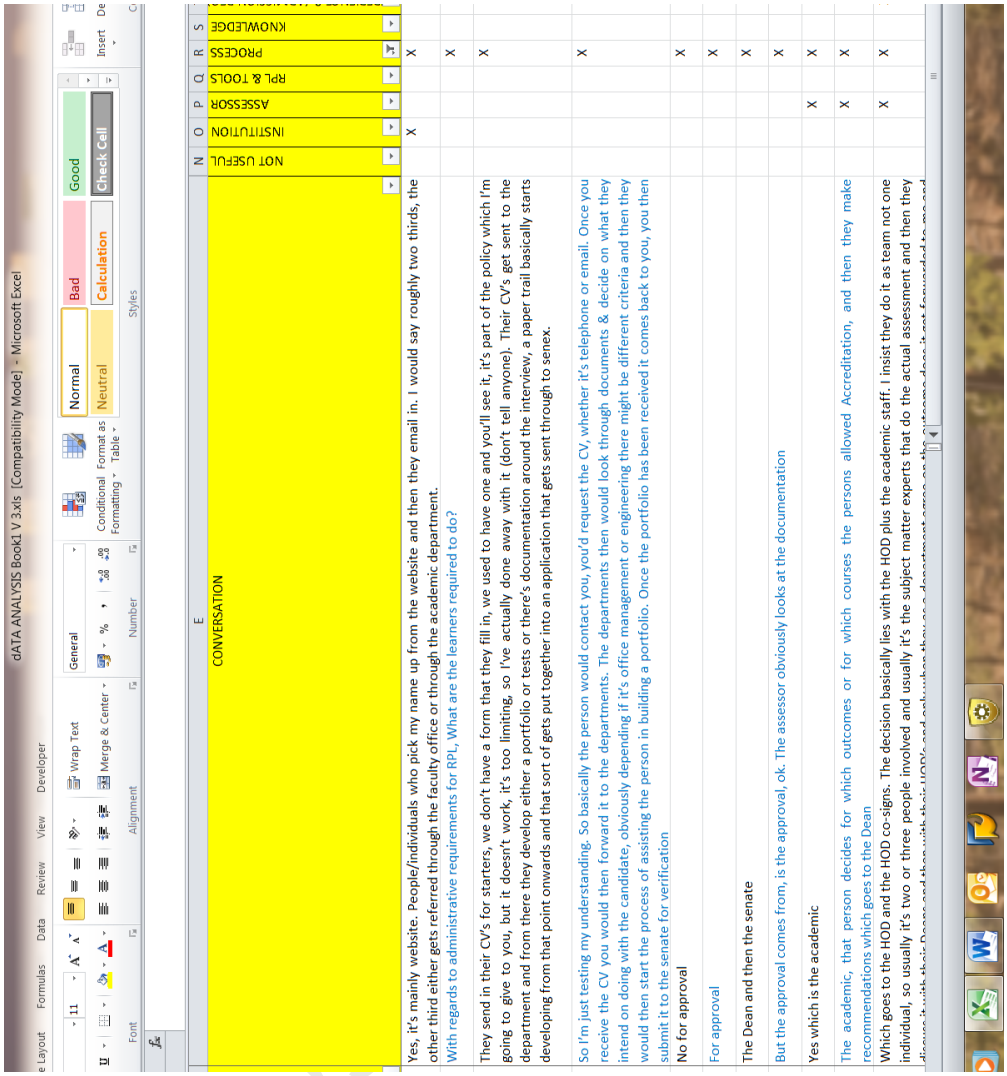


Figure 6: Sifting (Interview Transcripts)

An advantage of this process was that it allowed for quick identification of quotes, statements and individual comments, as it was possible to do a word search in the spread sheets.

3.6.6 Analysis Step Six: Plotting the interviews

The interviews were used to identify two aspects that were key to the research but that could not be derived from the evaluation of the portfolios:

1. What kinds of knowledge were the assessors looking for when they evaluated the portfolios or interviewed the candidates; and

2. What type of learning/knowledge did the assessors believe could not be RPL'd?

The information derived during the interviews in this regard was plotted on the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) Workplace Learning Model. The findings regarding the kind of knowledge the assessors looked for can be found in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3, Figure 10 and the findings regarding the type of learning/knowledge the assessors believed could not be RPL'd can be found in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3, Figure 11 for the results.

3.6.7 Final Step of Analysis

The data was then compared with earlier tables drawn from the portfolios in order to try and answer the research question.

3.7 Limitations of study

There were a number of practical limitations to what this study could achieve. The study might have been more effective if the assessment process could have been observed from start to finish. This would have allowed more insight into the deliberations concerning the RPL awards made by the assessors, the assessment committee and the senate. Interviews with the candidates were conducted during the RPL assessment, but no record of these interviews existed; therefore, the influence of these interviews on the RPL process and award could not be determined. It would have being preferable to have observed these interviews.

As the study is primarily attempting to identify to what extent informal workplace knowledge is being recognised, it would have been preferable if at least fifty per cent of the candidates had little or no formal institutional learning in the field of qualifications being assessed.

No method of equating qualifications versus experience or qualifications versus courses could be obtained, and therefore there might be bias in this regard.

3.8 Ethics

As the research was being conducted at an educational institution which is conducting RPL for the purposes of awarding credits or specific outcomes against qualification, informed written consent was granted from the Senior Professor and Chair of Post Graduate Studies

and the institution's Ethics Committee to conduct the research at the institution. All persons participating in the interviews were asked for their consent, and the researcher also offered to guarantee the anonymity of the persons participating in the study.

Informed written agreement to participate in the research was obtained from assessors. Initially, there was a concern that the assessor may mistrust the researcher's questions-with regards to the process and award of RPL i.e. that the researcher was perhaps questioning the assessor's judgement of the candidate or trying to find fault with the assessment process, but every attempt was made to ensure that these concerns were allayed.

Informed permission to evaluate the candidate's portfolio was obtained from the candidate. It was noted that the candidates who underwent the RPL were doing so for their own reasons and might have had certain assumptions with regards to the process, or what they hoped to achieve from it. The researcher therefore undertook not to influence the candidate's perceptions or assumptions towards RPL in any way.

The researcher undertook to minimise the expression of his views during the process and therefore, no comments or feedback of any kind was discussed with any of the persons participating in the research. Furthermore, the option of disclosure was made available to those persons participating, once all findings had been documented.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study sets out to establish the extent to which the recognition of prior learning (RPL) process in a University of Technology's Engineering faculty, recognises and accredits learning and knowledge acquired through work experience. It does this through a case study which analyses the views and practices of four assessors. This question can only be fully answered by comparing the answers to sub-questions 1 and 2 below using the evidence of workplace knowledge in the portfolios:

1. What type of knowledge is being assessed and awarded the formal recognition that the RPL process claims to provide?
2. What kind of knowledge, gained at which type(s) of institution(s), gets preference (workplaces, training centres, universities, etc.)?
3. What is the purpose of the RPL with regards to the type of perspective from which it is being conducted (i.e. technical/market or liberal/humanistic etc.)?

4.1 RPL process and practices

This section will firstly outline the institution's RPL policy -which has been summarised into the process and explanation in Figure 7. It provides guidelines for the RPL process, including: Personnel, Referral and Advisory functions, Initial meeting, Departmental Faculty Committee, Formal Application and payment of fees, RPL Assessment plan and collection of Evidence, Assessment and Moderation, Appeals, Institutional approval, Notification of RPL results, and Registration"(RPL Policy).

RPL Process	Explanation
Personnel	The institution's faculties and departments should have "designated members of staff" who are responsible for the RPL process in the department; these persons are required to provide the information to the RPL delegates. The policy specifies that these persons should be trained as RPL advisors who will guide the delegates through the RPL process, and as trained assessors to assess the evidence that is presented. Moderation is as per the institution's assessment policy.
Referral and advisory functions	Each faculty must have systems in place to "refer candidates to the designated person" in the faculty, who is able to provide guidelines relating to the procedure, costs and time frames.
Initial meeting	After receiving advice either from the RPL Unit or the faculty, the faculty designated person meets with the candidate to: • confirm the RPL application and to clarify the purpose of the RPL; • provide guidance to the candidate; • allow the candidate to demonstrate an understanding of the programme of study and possible evidence that would substantiate the RPL application; and • advise the candidate to complete the online screening questionnaire, which is reviewed by the Departmental Faculty Committee on RPL.
Departmental Faculty committee	A committee consisting of the Dean/HOD, subject matters experts , assessors and other qualified persons, including the RPL designated person. The committee provides advice on the Assessment Plan , the Type of RPL and the final approval of the RPL judgement.
Formal application and payment of fees	Once approved as an RPL candidate, the candidate must complete an application to study at the institution, and pay the necessary RPL and application fees.
RPL assessment plan and collection of evidence	Once the candidate and the assessor agree on the assessment plan, it is submitted to the 'Faculty Committee on RPL' for approval. Once the assessment plan is approved, the assessor will provide guidance to the candidate with regards to evidence collection.
Assessment and moderation	Evidence is assessed against the level descriptors and the identified programmes outcomes and a judgement is reached. The assessment report is then submitted for moderation. In turn, the moderation report is submitted to the Faculty RPL committee for approval.
Appeals	The candidate may appeal against the outcomes of the assessment.
Institutional approval	The reports are signed by the Dean and RPL office and submitted to the Senate Executive committee, who may formally approve or refer the report back to the faculty.
Notification of RPL results	The faculty office informs the candidate in writing of the result of the RPL application.
Registration	The candidate registers to complete the programme or qualification.

Figure 7: RPL Process (I-RPL policy)

It was found that the assessors followed the RPL process (as prescribed by the RPL policy), but with some deviation. The first noted deviation was the use of the screening questionnaire (see step 3). Only one of the four assessors continued to use the questionnaire as a tool. It was also noted that the HRPL was aware of, and even condoned,

the non-use of the questionnaire. The reason cited was that the tool was regarded as “not working” and “limiting” and the use of the questionnaire had been discontinued. The second deviation was the assigning of the term ‘assessor’. The policy refers to assessors who conducted the assessments, whilst they prefer saying ‘academics’ who conduct the assessments. This poses the question as to whether the naming of the assessors/ academics is merely an issue of semantics or if there is a stigma attached to being referred to as one or the other. Thirdly, the policy indicates that results should be forthcoming within six weeks of the initial application for access or advanced standing, and 3 months if a full qualification is awarded. In some instances, the time period of the process was longer, ranging from two to eight months. (I-RPL policy)

4.1.1 Profile of Candidates

The following information (Table 3) on the candidates was derived from the portfolio evidence submitted for RPL.

	Age	Year Experience in the area of RPL	Qualifications the learners possess (or have already completed)	Other noteworthy aspects
Candidate A	30 years	• 10 years 'experience in quantity surveying and project management in the electrical field. • 2 employers	• National Technical Certificate Level Four in Electrical Engineering	• Short courses in project management and Electrical Installation Regulations • 16 examples of projects completed in the workplace
Candidate B	42 years	• 11 years' experience in the building industry as a supervisor and project manager • 2 employers	• Partially completed BCom	• 2 short courses in entrepreneurial skills from BIFSA • 2 courses covering mediation and dispute resolution • 2 reference letters, one from a local municipality and the other from the tourism board in the area
Candidate C	27 years	• 7 years' experience in a consulting and structural engineering firm. • 1 Employer	• Subjects completed as part of the National Diploma in Engineering (S1-S3),	• 9 examples of drawings
Candidate D	34 years	• 12 years' experience in supply chain management and warehousing industry, designing warehousing system racking and trolleys • 2 Employers	• Diploma in Production and Supervision • Partially completed National Diploma in Mechanical Engineering	• 9 short courses in areas such as leadership, management, quality systems, safety, industrial relations and Microsoft Excel • 8 examples of projects completed in the workplace
Candidate E	37 years	• 13 years' experience in the communications industry • 5 employers	• National Diploma in Electrical Light Current Engineering (tertiary qualification) • National Diploma in Project Management • Partially completed BTech in Electrical Engineering	• 26 short courses in subjects relating to the communications industry • 2 examples of projects completed in the workplace • 13 examples of trips overseas relating to work
Candidate F	36 years	• 15 years' experience in electronic repairs relating to communications • 3 employers	• National Diploma in Electrical Engineering	• 7 short courses in subjects such as project management and power supply design • 5 examples of projects

Table 3: Candidates Information

The candidates' ages ranged from 27 to 42 years, with work experience (in the relevant areas of RPL) ranging from seven to fifteen years. Five of the candidates have work experience ranging between ten and fifteen years with one of the candidates, the youngest (27 years), having seven years' experience. All five candidates, older than 30 years, have more than 10 years' work experience and have been employed by more than two employers. The youngest candidate, who has the least amount of experience (seven years),

has had one employer. Despite this, it is impossible to say from this sample that a correlation exists between a candidate's age, the number of employers and the number of years' experience offered, as the oldest person (44) had the third least experience (11 years).In terms of qualifications: four of the candidates had completed some type of diploma, while the youngest candidate was studying to obtain a diploma and had accumulated subjects on the various levels required for the diploma. The oldest candidate, at 44 years, had the least qualifications, as this candidate had started studying towards a Bachelor of Commerce degree but had not completed the first year and was now considering studying in the building environment. Three of the six candidates had studied, or were studying, in the electrical engineering field, one in mechanical and the other in structural engineering. Five of the candidates had completed short courses relevant to their RPL application and all the candidates had work experience in the field they requested to be RPL'd in.

4.1.2 Profile of Assessors

According to the HRPL, the institution was aligning itself with SAQA's RPL Policy. The SAQA RPL policy refers to the persons who conduct assessments as assessors, and these persons are required to be trained in the unit standard "Plan and Conduct Assessment of Learning" (SAQA, 2002:22 &40). The policy further explains that the person conducting the assessment and the person/s assisting in the evidence collection, need not be the same person, but that one should be an expert on the subject matter or trained to perform the assessment function. The persons conducting the RPL assessments are referred to as assessors in the institution's RPL policy. Contrary to this, they are referred to as "academics who do the assessment" (HRPL) within the institution. When the HRPL was asked whether the assessors are registered in terms of SAQA, the response (see quote below) was that the assessors are not legally required to undergo training and registration because the institution is part of the HE environment:

> No they're not legally required; it's not like the guys in Further Education and Training who have to be registered at level 5 ... It's a bit too low … there is assessors standard (unit standard) at level 7 .. we train … but it is not legally required, no. (HRPL)

While it is evident from the quote above that the criteria used for assessors are different from the SAQA requirements, the institution's criteria for academics who conduct the assessments are as follows:

- The academic "needs to be an expert is his field" (HRPL)
- The academic should complete a course on how to conduct RPL assessments, but this has only been "compulsory for the past three years for newly appointed academics."(HRPL)

Furthermore, the institution does conduct training for the assessors, not at the NQF Level 5 prescribed by SAQA, but rather at NQF level 7.

The assessors who participated in the study are profiled as follows:

a) **'Assessor 1'** is a Senior Lecturer in the 'Built Environment' Department and has been with the institution for 14 years.
b) **'Assessor 2'** works in the Civil Engineering and Surveying Department, and has been with the institution for 11 years. This assessor has been conducting RPL assessments for five to six years.
c) **'Assessor 3'** works in the Mechanical Engineering Department. This assessor's work portfolio deals with placing mechanical engineering students for in-service training and has being conducting RPL officially since 2009.
d) **'Assessor 4'** is an Associate Professor in the Electrical Engineering Department, and has been with the institution since 2003. This assessor is Programme Director of the institution's Space satellite project and has being conducting RPL since 2006.

The Assessors were responsible for the following RPL assessments:

- 'Assessor 1' was responsible for 'Candidate A' and 'Candidate B';
- 'Assessor 2' was responsible for 'Candidate C';
- 'Assessor 3' was responsible for 'Candidate D'; and
- 'Assessor 4' was responsible for 'Candidate E' and 'Candidate F'

4.1.3 Purposes of RPL

It is clear from the institution's policies (Types of RPL and Residency Clause) that the assessor during the RPL process cannot award whole qualifications. This is echoed by the comments of the assessors and the HRPL: *"*You see you can't ask for a qualification. You either want access or advanced standing." (Assessor 1 - Built Environment) and "We wouldn't RPL a qualification." (Assessor 2 - Civil Engineering). The process of not awarding RPL for qualifications was further highlighted by the HRPL's views of the Senate's response to the situation:

> A former … student who had two subjects missing for his national diploma, submitted a portfolio and was approved by the department, by me and by the Dean, and then on the form that I filled in I wrote there "**Please provide advanced standing for these two subjects and therefore the national diploma can be awarded (my bold).** If I had not put those full words in it, it probably would not have gone through.(HRPL)

While The Senate's initial response to the above situation was: *"*We don't award qualifications on RPL" (HRPL), this situation was resolved by the HRPL's explanation that the RPL was requested to provide advanced standing of two subjects. There were instances of persons being awarded advanced standing for more than two subjects. It took eight months for the Senate to agree, and this agreement came with a recommendation that the candidate "writes a test" before being awarded the diploma (HRPL).

Whilst RPL is not awarded for qualifications at the institution, it is awarded for Access and Advanced Standing and Exemption. The assessor and the candidate determine the purpose of RPL at the initial RPL meeting. The data in Table 4 has been derived from the assessment and moderation documents and reflects the purpose for which RPL was requested and awarded.

	Assessor 1 (Built Environment)		Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering)	Assessor 3 (Mechanical Engineering)	Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering)	
	Candidate A	**Candidate B**	**Candidate C**	**Candidate D**	**Candidate E**	**Candidate F**
Purpose for which RPL was requested, as described by the assessor in the Assessment and Moderation Report	Access to BTech Quantity Surveying on the basis of having completed the entry requirement for BTech	Advanced Standing • National Diploma Building – First Year	Drawing II – within Civil Engineering	Mechanical Engineering: Practice 1 and 2	Advanced Standing for: • Industrial Projects IV • Computer Networks IV which allows the candidate to complete BTech and enrol into the MTech	Advanced Standing • Industrial Projects IV
Candidate's Previous NQF Level based on highest qualification	NQF 5 – National Technical Certificate Level 4	NQF 4 - Grade 12	National Diploma - First Year Studies		NQF 6 - National Diploma: Electrical Engineering	NQF 6 - National Diploma: Electrical Engineering
Proposed Programme / Qualification for future study	National Diploma: Building	Advanced Standing National Diploma: Building – Second Year	National Diploma: Civil Engineering	ND: Mechanical Engineering	M:Tech Electrical Engineering	
NQF level in which RPL assisted	NQF 6	NQF 5	NQF 6	NQF 6	NQF 7	NQF 7
RPL awarded for	Second Year National Diploma Building	Advanced Standing National: Diploma Building – First Year	Drawing II	Exemption for Mechanical Engineering Practice 1 and 2	Advanced Standing: (credit) Industrial Projects IV Computer Networks IV	Advanced Standing: (credit) Industrial Projects IV

Table 4: Purpose of RPL

With reference to Breier (2008: 28-33) (2003: 17-25), it appears that the RPL is conducted at the institution from 'Technical / Market' and 'Liberal/Humanist' perspectives. These two perspectives can be equated with the institution's 'advanced standing' and '*access*' RPL respectively.

When discussing the purpose of RPL with Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering), the response was as follows:

> I think one of the considerations would be on what level and what purpose he wants the RPL. At the end of the day if he's successful it doesn't really matter what his purpose was to start out with. I ask him 'what do you want to achieve?'. If it's to stay in the company but you need a better pay… yes then academic knowledge is probably not as important.

What Assessor 4 implies here is that the purpose of the RPL really does not matter, as long as an RPL award is made. I disagree. The purpose of RPL is directly linked to what the learner hopes to achieve when applying to the institution: the learner wishes to gain access to a field of study or advanced standing for a specific subject.

4.1.4 RPL Tools

The institution's RPL policy makes reference to a number of assessment tools that are available for assessors to use –the portfolio, CV, challenge tests, demonstrations and observation, peer reports and testimonials, reflective writing, examples of work and product assessments, presentations, interviews, academic records or short courses, essays or assignments, job descriptions and performance appraisals or reviews, autobiographical learning history, mind mapping and research proposals. Assessors select tools dependent on the subject or course outcomes for which RPL has been requested. When asked how RPL tools are selected, Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering) responded:

> Depending on the particular subject and the outcomes required for that subject, we would then match the tool to that. For example, if it was a recognition for a particular subject, for example Survey, and the person has been working as a surveyor for x amount of years …, we would give him a written test; we would ask them to produce examples of the work that they've done and we may even set up a practical, but it will depend on the particular circumstances. What we've done in the past is a competency test, which would be the practical component prior to asking the person to then produce a portfolio.

This response that assessment tools are selected on the basis of what is going to be assessed was echoed by all the assessors and it can therefore be concluded that the assessment tool selection is dependent on the subject or course outcomes for which RPL is requested.

Screening Questionnaire

RPL Candidates either find out about RPL through the internet or by contacting the relevant departments themselves, and in both cases it appears that candidates are referred to the RPL office to begin the process. According to the process, candidates are required to complete a questionnaire that is available online. But, as discussed earlier, the use of the screening questionnaire has being discontinued. As a result, the RPL office asks the candidates to submit a short CV which is used to identify whether the RPL candidate has formal education that may be considered for exemption, and whether the candidate has "sufficient and relevant work experience" (HRPL) to be considered for RPL. The CV is also used to identify the purpose of the RPL (access/advanced standing etc.), whether the candidate is requesting RPL in a field that is relevant to experience (e.g. somebody who

wants to study public management but may be a more suitable candidate for, say, office management) and the feasibility of the RPL.

Whilst, according to the HRPL, the online screening questionnaire is no longer a requirement of the RPL process, Assessor 3 (Mechanical Engineering) continues to utilise the questionnaire. Contrary to the comments made by the HRPL with regards to the form being 'limiting', (not providing sufficient information), Assessor 3 believes that the form is a valuable tool in the RPL process, as the assessor is able to "determine from the outset" if the student should go ahead with the RPL application.

Meeting

The initial meeting (between the candidate and the assessor), as described in the RPL policy, is used to determine and confirm the RPL application; to discuss the purpose of the RPL; to provide guidance to the candidate; to allow the candidate to demonstrate understanding of proposed field of study; to consider the possible types of evidence that would substantiate the RPL application and to advise the candidate to complete the online screening questionnaire (form) to be reviewed by the Departmental Faculty Committee on RPL. This meeting is conducted on a one-to-one basis between the assessor and the candidate.

Some of the departments (assessors) have slight variations of opinion on the purpose of the meeting. Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering) uses the meeting to discuss and agree on timelines, provide the candidate with the necessary forms and, along with the candidate, agree on the purpose and subject/field of RPL. Assessor 1 (Built Environment) is of the opinion that obtaining the CV is the role of the RPL office and that the department (the assessor) provides advice on the type of evidence that would substantiate the RPL application.

Interviews

The interview provides the assessor with an opportunity to engage the RPL candidate in a discussion with regards to practical application, theoretical background, and opportunity to elucidate the portfolio. For example, when evidence is required for a specific outcome and

the evidence is not clearly identified in the portfolio, then the assessors should use the interview to make the candidate's understanding of the outcome explicit.

This view is evident from the interview with Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering). When asked what would be done to identify outcomes if the assessor could not identify them in the portfolio, Assessor 4 replied: "Those instances will be dealt with in the interviews. "Three of the assessors made use of the interview process. Assessor 3 (Mechanical Engineering) did so on a one-to-one basis with the candidate while Assessors 2 (Civil Engineering) and 4 conducted panel assessments to minimize subjectivity. It was also noted that neither a transcript nor recording of interviews is/was kept – which posed the question: How are the assessments moderated if there is no evidence?

Curriculum Vitae

The CV provides an overview of the candidate's achievements. It provides the candidates with an opportunity to list their competencies: "It provides background to all other evidence provided" (RPL Policy- Guidelines on the assessment tools).

The Challenge Test

The Challenge Test was used (in this study) by Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering), to evaluate candidates' drawing skills. Evidence of the Challenge test was included in the candidate's portfolio. The institution's RPL policy describes the purpose of the Challenge test as an opportunity to evaluate if the candidate has gained enough knowledge through work experience, self-study or other courses, to satisfy the subject requirements of an HE environment. "The candidate has to be appropriately briefed, with an indication of the topics or areas that will be included, linking them to the learning areas." (I-RPL Policy).

In our discussions, Assessor 1 (Built Environment) mentioned the possibility of using the Challenge test, but there was no evidence of this assessor having done so for Candidates A and B.

Workplace Documents

Much of the evidence provided was examples of documents created at work. The examples included drawings, letters to customers, project plans, reports and so on. The problem with this type of evidence is that their authenticity cannot be established.

Academic Record and Short Courses

Assessors are required to evaluate the "content and level" of those courses not offered by HE institutions (I-RPL Policy). Similarly, SAQA (2001: 38-39) requires that historical and indirect evidence must be verified. In terms of this study, it was noted that short course certificates (both internal and external with regard to the companies at which the candidates were employed) were part of the evidence provided.

Whether the assessors verify certificates is not clear. For example, Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering) used the marks of a candidate's partially-completed BTech as one of the criteria for awarding the RPL. These results were easily verifiable as the courses were completed at the institution, within the HE environment. But as can be seen from Assessor 1's (Built Environment) comments, when asked if we could discuss Candidate B's portfolio, his first response was that we should have chosen another portfolio. He then went on to explain:

> I look at her at her certificates, …., if there's a case like this we might not ask you to come in for an interview, 'cause she actually has certificates and looks like 1st year level, like NQF level 5. Then we wouldn't ask you to come in if you want 2nd year.We'll give you 2nd year.

Assessor 1 used Candidates B's certificates as the fundamental basis or the assessment of Candidate B in the assessor and moderator report. Based on the certificate[3], she noted that she easily could have awarded Candidate B access to Level 2.

Portfolio

The portfolio is used to provide comprehensive evidence of the candidate's "learning achievement and applied competence"(I-RPL Policy).The RPL guiding principle illuminates the fact that RPL candidates require guidance in developing their portfolios, and that the

[3] But she also states that the certificate "looks like NQF Level 5". On my evaluation of the certificates, however the certificates (two) appeared to be short courses and therefore could not be equated to NQF level Five (120 credits).

portfolios should not be "just a combination of documents, but an overarching and integrated account of what the application is all about and what is included in process" (I-RPL Policy).This seemed to be the case with the portfolios examined in this study. While being a combination of documents, the portfolio provided a holistic view of the candidate – the candidate's work history (CV), current job description, educational history and short courses completed, the candidate's ability at work (documents from work), the purpose of the RPL, the intent from the candidate to study further (covering letter) as well as the assessor and moderator reports with their comments highlighting the candidate's key achievements.

4.2 Knowledge, Learning and Experience Evidenced in portfolio

The candidates were provided with guidance throughout the portfolio development process, as required by the institution's RPL policy and SAQA guidelines (2001: 34): "The learner and assessor plan the portfolio jointly as sources of evidence may vary. The learner is then responsible for the collection of evidence and the compilation of the portfolio."

Table 5 below provides insight into the types of evidence that constitute the portfolios.

	Assessor 1 (Built Environment)		Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering)	Assessor 3 (Mechanical Engineering)	Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering)	
	Candidate A	**Candidate B**	**Candidate C**	**Candidate D**	**Candidate E**	**Candidate F**
Purpose for which RPL was requested, as described by the assessor in the Assessment and Moderation Report	Access to BTech Quantity Surveying on the basis of having completed the entry requirement to BTech	Advanced Standing National Diploma Building – First Year	Drawing II – within Civil Engineering	Mechanical Engineering: Practice 1 and 2	Advanced Standing • Industrial Projects IV • Computer Networks IV, This will allow the candidate to complete BTech and enrol into the MTech	Advanced Standing Industrial Projects IV
Covering Letter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Curriculum Vitae	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
RPL Screening Questionnaire				Yes		
Academic record	National Technical Diploma NQF 4 : Electrical Engineering	Partially completed BCom Matric	Subjects for National Diploma S1-S3 towards National Diploma in Civil Engineering	Diploma In Production & Supervision Partially completed National Diploma in Mechanical Engineering	National Diploma in Light Current Advice of results from institution Diploma in Project Management BTech - partially completed	National Diploma in Light Current Advice of results from institution B Tech - partially completed
Evidence of Short Courses	2 external short courses	4 short courses	None	4 external short courses 5 internal courses	22 external short courses 4 internal courses	3 external short courses 4 internal courses
Work Experience	2 employers 10 years' experience	2 Employers (letters from employer) – 11 years' experience	1 employer - 7 years' experience	2 different employers in relevant field – 12 years' experience	5 different employers in relevant field – 13 years' experience (April 1994 – RPL date)	3 different employers in relevant field – 15 years (1992– RPL date)
Examples of Work	16 projects	2 Samples of plans 2 samples of quotes	9 examples of project drawings provided	8 examples of projects provided	2 examples of projects provided	5 examples of projects provided
Challenge Test			Drawings –hand drawn and computer generated (AutoCad)– to demonstrate his skill at Drawing Conventions &Practice			
Other		2 letters of networking (tourism board – indicating that work was completed, and a Municipality – indicating candidate was "Woman in Construction" chairperson		Performance letter and sporting certificates	Photographs of work sites 2 Certificates of Appreciation 13 overseas trips (passport) to places such as USA, Hong Kong	

Table 5: Description of content of candidates' portfolios

The candidates' portfolios (Table 5) differed in terms of format, size and the type of evidence submitted, covering a variety of the RPL tools. The main variation was in the amount of evidence that was placed in the portfolio. This ranged from approximately 30 pages to 200 pages. The content varied from evidence of 22 short courses and 2 examples

of projects (Candidate E) to 2 short courses and 16 examples of projects (Candidate A). During the interview with Assessor 1 (Built Environment), when the assessor was asked if Candidate B's portfolio could be reviewed, the assessor's response was: "I just feel she wouldn't be a perfect example". In the context of the conversation this meant that the portfolio of Candidate B was not a good portfolio to discuss. The assessor went on to make the following statement:

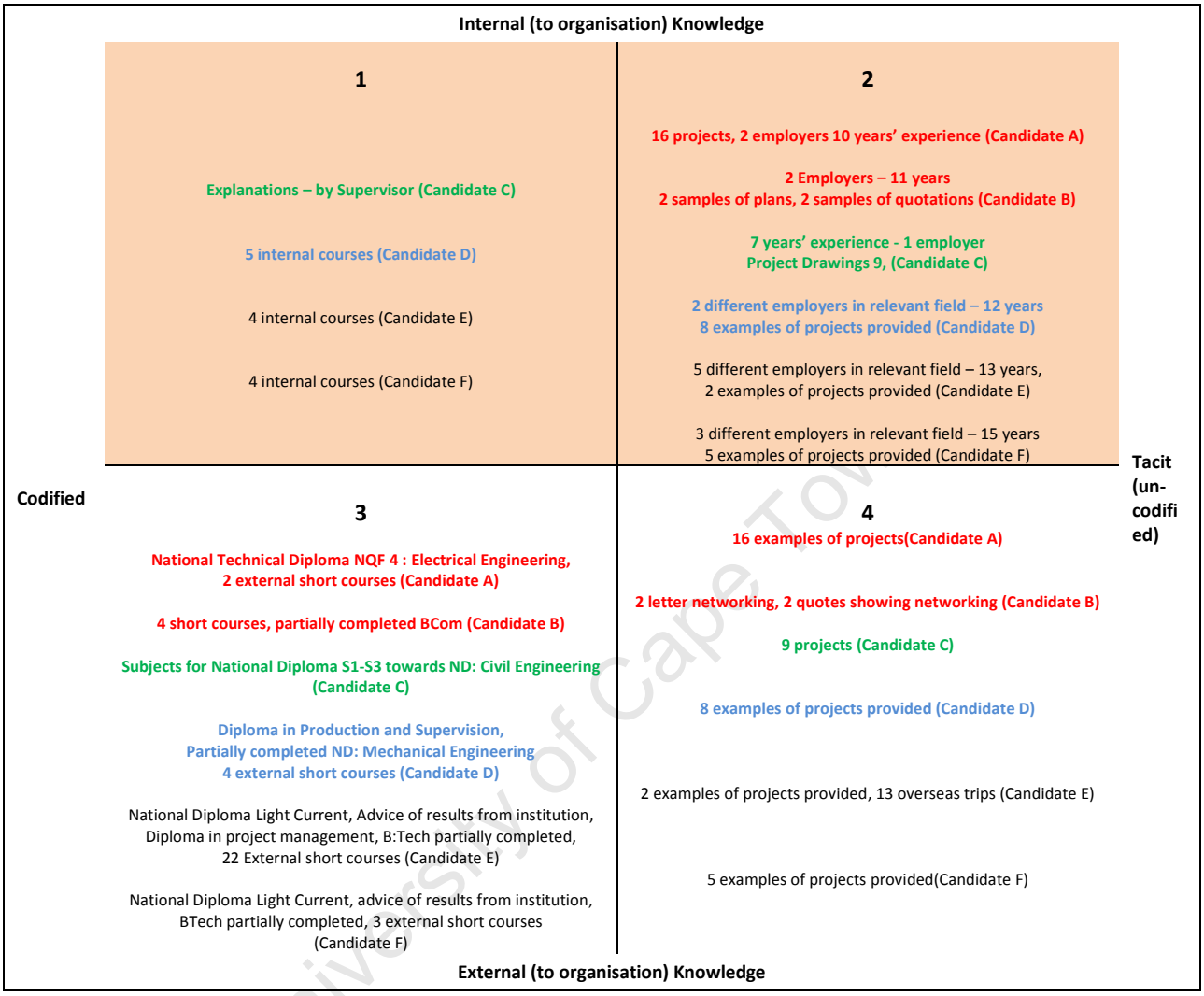
> …our recommendation to …HRPL… the end of last year was we would like to standardise it (the portfolio), maybe because we're engineers and in terms evidence, we would rather in the space provided, provide evidence of measurement, evidence of this, evidence of that, so it just makes it easier for us, whereas if you look at 10 different candidates you'll see 10 different CV's… (Assessor 1 - Built Environment)

Assessor 1 was therefore stating that because portfolios differ so greatly in terms of format, size, and the type of evidence presented (Table 5), he/she would prefer to see the portfolio standardised. However, standardising the portfolio could present problems too as certain learners' work experience might not suit the restrictions of a standardised document.

4.3 Analysis of Portfolios

The portfolios were analysed to identify what type of knowledge was present in the portfolio (i.e. Tacit, Codified, Internal and External) as well as what type of learning was being given preference to by the candidates and the assessor (when s/he guided the candidate during the assessment process.) This data would be evaluated against what knowledge the assessors valued.

Figure 8 was derived after all the evidence in the candidates' portfolios (see 3.6.3 Analysis Step Three) was referenced against the Hopkins and Maglen Organisational Learning Model (2000) (see below). The data derived from this process will be discussed in terms of the Organisational Learning Model classifications for Internal Codified, Internal Tacit, External Codified and External Tacit knowledge.



	Red - Assessor 1 (Built Environment)
	Green - Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering)
	Blue - Assessor 3 (Mechanical Engineering)
	Black - Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering)
	Organisational Learning

Figure 8: RPL Evidence in terms of the Hopkins and Maglen Organisational Learning Model

The following explains how the evidence was classified/coded:

Internal Codified

As seen from Figure 8, Candidates D,E and F all submitted proof of internal short courses in their portfolio, and Candidate C provided proof of having been taught by his supervisor at

work (explanations by supervisor). These types of interventions are considered to be "Internal Codified Knowledge".

Internal Tacit

According to Hopkins and Maglen (2000; 243-244), Internal Tacit Knowledge is knowledge obtained through experience; it is "knowledge in action" and it is acquired through "learning by doing". Considering the Hopkins and Maglen explanation, and the assumption that the more years of employment and the more employers a candidate has been exposed to, the greater the candidate's opportunities for experience or exposure to a greater variety of "learning in action." Then Assessors 4's Candidates (E and F) would appear to have the most work-related experience and knowledge as opposed to Assessor 2's candidate (one employer and seven years' experience). All the candidates provided proof of their work experience by incorporating examples of projects (proof of experience and applied knowledge) and 'learning by doing' in their portfolios. No correlation could easily be seen between the amount of project evidence submitted and the amount of experience/number of employers the candidate had had.

External Codified

As can be seen from Figure 8, the learners' portfolios contain numerous examples of evidence of external short courses. In terms of the Hopkins and Maglen Organisational Learning Model, these types of learning are not specific to any particular workplace context. For example, the knowledge derived out of completing a course in National Regulations on Electrical Engineering can be used in any workplace requiring this qualification. With regards to external short courses, five out of the six candidates' (A,B,D,E and F) portfolios contained evidence on external short courses. The exception was candidate C. With regards to the guidance given to the learners for developing the portfolio, all the candidates provided evidence of knowledge and learning obtained through formal qualifications. Five of the Candidates' (B, C, D, E, F,) portfolios contained evidence of partially completed diplomas and degrees, whilst four Candidates (A, D, E and F)had completed National Diplomas. Some overlap between the partially-completed and completed qualifications was noted; Candidates D, E and F were all currently completing an additional qualification.

External Tacit

Candidates A, C, D, E and F provided proof of External Tacit Knowledge (Figure 8), as the overseas trips for work purposes, projects, quotes, and drawings provide proof of interaction and networking with customers, suppliers, informal exchanges and socialisation.

Summary of the assessment of the portfolios

After evaluating the portfolios and plotting the evidence against the Hopkins and Maglen Organisational learning model, it must be noted that the evidence is varied in terms of the types of evidence and knowledge submitted by the candidates for assessment. All the candidates submitted evidence of:

- Internal Tacit Knowledge
- External Codified Knowledge
- External Tacit Knowledge

Candidates A and B did not submit evidence of Internal Codified Knowledge. All other candidates did.

Evidence was submitted for the Areas 1,2, and 4 which, for the purposes (and specific interest) of this study, represent workplace learning. It must also be noted that most of the evidence submitted in the portfolios fell into the categories of Internal Tacit Knowledge and External Codified Knowledge.

4.4 Knowledge, Learning and Experience Valued by the Assessors

Whilst the previous section of this analysis deals with the evaluation of documentary evidence (portfolios, assessor and moderator reports), it is by no means the only way of identifying what knowledge the assessors recognise. This section will draw on the interviews as a means of identifying what knowledge the assessors value.

4.4.1 Experience

Work experience is used as a criterion for access into the RPL programme. The HRPL assesses the CV for "sufficient and relevant work experience". The CV is then further assessed by the individual assessors to see if the candidate meets with the departmental RPL access criteria. Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering) and 3 (Mechanical Engineering) whose work portfolios have them involved in the experiential learning components in their departments, call for 5 years' and 3 years' experience respectively in order for the candidates to be considered for the RPL process.

Whilst Assessors 1 and 4 provided no specific figure, both felt that sufficient work experience is a prerequisite. Assessor 4 explained that:

> ... whether you say 7 years or 1 year, I mean in the interview, we will see ... we tick it off.; I mean you can't work 7 years in a management position and not really optimally manage so, … very difficult to quantify, you've got limits, I give you this.(Assessor 4 Electrical Engineering)

What Assessor 4 meant here was that whilst the number of years of experience are important in RPL, the depth or scope of this experience cannot necessarily be defined. It is rather the type of experience that the candidate has gained which is important. So, the question we must ask is: Does the length of work experience have a significant impact on the learner's progress? Three of the assessors agree that older/more experienced students generally fare better at the institution, but the case mentioned below poses the question about whether the number of years of experience should be used as access criteria.

> We got this student now repeating first year … in his late 30s, early 40s. He didn't come through RPL.He came through with an application from passing matric maybe 15 - 20 years ago, but he's worked … for 15 years … in the construction industry and he meets all the minimum requirements … he's sitting in first year for the second time … he failed all his subjects … With 15 years' experience … I would have put him into level 2. ... my colleagues thought he was RPL'd because he's much older … no, he came in and he met all the minimum requirements.(Assessor 1 - Built Environment)

From Assessor 1's explanation it would appear that s/he values work experience as s/he would have placed the learner at a higher level based on work experience. It is clear from Assessor 1's explanation above however, that the learner, despite having extensive work experience, was not performing optimally at the lowest level in the institution. If we assume then that it is not the 'number of years' of experience that allows the majority of older learners to perform well at the institution, then what is it? Assessor's 1 and 4 provide the following reason why they believe older, more experienced learners fair well:

> I think it's a maturity … they're more focused and …they've seen that 'yes if I apply my mind and I improve myself academically; if I grow then my chances outside becomes better. (Assessor 4 Electrical Engineering)

And

> The other students draw to them, … they … kind of land up mentoring the other students, …their knowledge …. confidence.(Assessor 1 Built Environment)

It appears from the assessors' comments that it is the life skills or non-technical knowledge that allows most of these older more experienced learners to fair well at the institution. As 'adult' learners they are confident, have more knowledge and are more focused and mature. They realise that if they improve academically their work opportunities will improve.

Authenticity

The assessors were probed on how they ensured that the evidence in the learner's portfolio is the learner's own work. The purpose of this question was to identify if the assessors were evaluating workplace evidence (and learning) that was authentic. The logic behind the question was that if the assessors did not consider the authenticity of the evidence, then the evidence value to the assessors could be in question. If the candidate is observed performing a task or writing an assessment, there is very little doubt about the authenticity of the evidence. However, where indirect evidence is produced, the assessor has to verify that the evidence is the learner's own work. (SAQA 2001: 37). The responses were:

> What we ask the supervisor in the workplace to do is to peruse the document and then attach a letter to say that this is the student's original work. (Assessor 2-Civil Engineering)

And

> … signed by the senior person at that company.(Assessor 3-Mechanical Engineering)

Candidate F (Assessor 4 Electrical Engineering) produced a letter from the company that substantiated that the work in the portfolio was the learner's own work. From the two responses above and the letter in Candidate F's portfolio, it is clear that three of the four assessors were concerned about the authenticity of the evidence. By allowing the workplace to authenticate the evidence, the assessors also implied a significant degree of trust in the workplace. This, in turn, also indicates the importance of workplace learning to the assessors.

Workplace Language

The institution's medium of instruction is English (Assessor 2-Civil Engineering) and therefore the RPL assessment is generally conducted in English. Where the evidence language is different (for example, Chinese), candidates are asked for transcript translations of the evidence to accompany the originals.

The question of language usage was posed to the assessors to ascertain if they permitted and accepted the use of workplace terminology during the assessment process. This question was identifying if the assessors would accept workplace language which would indirectly indicate if they were are also recognising work experience, workplace learning and knowledge. Candidates who offered work experience only, might not be familiar with the formalised/technically-correct terminology. While none of the assessors could recall specific instances of having to accept colloquial (workplace) terms, they all agreed that workplace terminology would/could be accepted, provided that the assessors were familiar with the terms used. Assessors 2's comments below echo this:

> We would then look at: do they understand what that term actually means because most of us that come from an industry background would know what the colloquial terms are; if they use a term that is meant, that we know means that same thing in industry, we would then probe to find out…. People in consulting, however, would use the technical terms required, but if it's an accepted non-technical term, but it means exactly the same thing, we would usually accept it because it does mean the same thing in the industry. (Assessor 2-Civil Engineering)

Whilst Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering) indicated that he would accept workplace knowledge, he went on to explain: "It also depends on the level … at the post graduates … I would definitely not take a guy that's just off a trade," as the "communication skills must match … the phase that you're entering into," but "maybe at S1, S2 level ….. you may be able to point a blind eye."

What Assessor 4 suggested was that he would accept workplace terminology depending on the level of RPL that the candidate was requesting i.e. a person requesting RPL at a post graduate level would be required to use academic terminology, and workplace terminology would then no longer be acceptable.

SAQA (RPL 2002: 22) states that assessor training should include a component on language to ensure that language will not bias the assessment process should the candidate use "colloquialisms for work processes, equipment and tools". But where language is a key component in the recognition of what is being RPL'd, then language should be an integral part of the RPL assessment.

It is clear that all the assessors recognised workplace language during the assessment process. As mentioned in the Literature Review (Fenwick 2001: 9-11), there are studies suggesting that knowledge is influenced by both the written and oral communication in the workplace. Thus, in their willingness to recognise workplace language, the assessors were demonstrating their willingness to recognise workplace knowledge.

4.4.2 Assessment and Moderation Reports

In the Assessor and Moderator Reports (see Appendix G), the assessors describe the types of evidence on which they based their RPL judgement. Considering that the portfolios have such a variety of evidence (see Section 4.2), the evidence that assessors deemed necessary to highlight or describe in their Assessment and Moderation reports was assumed to be more highly valued. Table 6 below lists evidence in the portfolios that the assessors and moderators described in the reports.

Note The asterisk (*) denotes documents that were placed in the applicants' portfolios as evidence but not highlighted in the assessor and moderator reports. i.e. Assessors 3 and 4 deemed it necessary to mention the candidates CVs, whilst Assessors 1 and 2 did not make mention/describe the applicants' CVs in the Assessment and Moderation Reports, even though they were contained in their portfolios.						
Assessor	**Assessor 1 (Built Environment)**		**Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering)**	**Assessor 3**	**Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering)**	
Candidate	**Candidate A**	**Candidate B**	**Candidate C**	**Candidate D**	**Candidate E**	**Candidate F**
Covering Letter	*	*	*	*	Motivation for RPL and the candidate's intention to enrol for MTech	Motivation for RPL
CV	*	*	*	Detailing his current and previous job description and functions and courses attended	Detailing his current and previous job description, functions and courses attended	Detailing his current and previous job description and functions
RPL Screening questionnaire				RPL Screening Questionnaire Completed		
Portfolio Highlights	*	*	Portfolio of Work going back 7 Years	Exceeds requirement based on POE for Mechanical Engineering Practice 2	Experience in Industry Projects Experience in Computer Networks	Extensive portfolio of the candidate's industry experience in project management
Interview				One-on-one Interview (no records of these interviews existed)	Panel interview: To confirm proficiency in Project Management and computer networks fields	Panel Interview: To confirm proficiency in Project Management
Evidence of Short Courses	*	*		*	Project Management and Computer Networks	*
Challenge Test			Drawings - hand drawn and computer generated (AutoCad) to demonstrate skill at Drawing Conventions and Practice			
Outcomes (and assessment of the evidence)	The applicant's evidence of work was compared against the assessment criteria of the National Diploma in Building	The portfolio was compared with to the exit level outcomes and assessment criteria of the first year's work	The course outcomes of Drawings II was compared against the evidence provided in the Portfolio And Completed Survey II which is a co-requisite to Drawing II	Compared Portfolio, and CV against required outcomes and "Sufficient overlap found" (Assessor 3)	The candidate's work experience was compared against the outcomes of Projects IV and Computer Networks IV	The candidate's work experience was compared against the outcomes of Industrial Projects IV
Other note - worthy aspects highlighted by Assessor in report		*"Completed a variety of short courses in Entrepreneurship (BIFSA) and other topics such as Mediation"* (Assessor 1)				
Tertiary Studies	*	*	Completed Survey II	*	*	Partially completed BTech

Table 6: RPL tools as described in the assessment and moderation reports.

Looking at Table 6 with regards to the type of evidence that the academics deemed important (valued), the following was noted and plotted against the Hopkins and Maglin Organisational Learning Model (see section 4.6.4):

- **Assessor 1 (Built Environment)** referenced the work experience or "work carried out" in the candidates' portfolios as well as the two short courses of Candidate B in the assessment and moderation reports. An aspect of the report that is not clear is the reference to "Completed a variety of short courses in Entrepreneurship (BIFSA) and other topics such Mediation"(Assessor 1).It was not clear what the other relevant courses were, as the portfolio and CV only made specific mention of the Entrepreneurship (BIFSA) and Mediation courses.

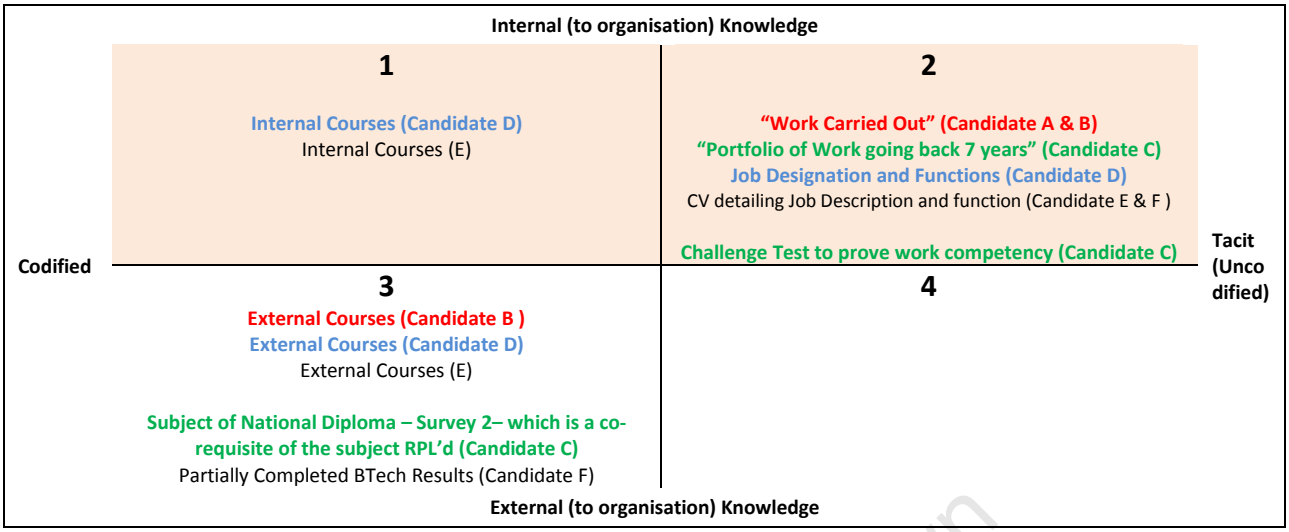
- **Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering)** highlighted the following aspects in the report: "Seven years' work experience", and a challenge test to prove work competency. With regards to tertiary qualification, the Assessor noted the following: "Completed Survey II which is a co-requisite of the subject for which RPL was requested."

- **Assessor 3 (Mechanical Engineering)** highlighted the job description and short courses attended. It must be noted that Candidate D attended both internal and external short courses, and it could not be determined from the assessment and moderation report to which course type the assessor was referring.

- **Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering)** highlighted the job description and the experience (of Candidates E and F) and short courses attended by Candidate E. It must be noted that Candidate E attended both internal and external short courses and it could not be determined from the assessment and moderation report to which course-type the assessor was referring. In addition Assessor 4 also highlighted Candidates F's "partially completed BTech results".

Another aspect that the table highlighted was that Assessors 3 and 4 referenced informal or workplace learning as part of the moderation and assessment reports whereas Assessors 1 and 2 seemed to focus on equivalent course outcomes.

The data will be discussed in terms of the Hopkins and Maglin Organisational Learning Categories: Internal, External, Codified and Tacit.



	Red – Assessor 1 (Built Environment)
	Green – Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering)
	Blue – Assessor 3 (Mechanical Engineering)
	Black – Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering)
	Organisational Learning

Figure 9: Hopkins and Maglen Grid, plotting the evidence described in the Assessment and Moderation Reports

Internal Codified

Assessor 3 and 4 both mention the short courses of Candidates D and E in the assessment and moderation reports. Both of these candidates listed internal and external courses in their portfolios and therefore recognition must be given to the assessors' valuing of this knowledge. It cannot be said that Assessor 1 (Built Environment) is valuing Internal Codified Knowledge as the portfolio of Candidate B (who was the other candidate whose assessor and moderator report referenced short courses) did not contain this type of evidence. In terms of Internal Codified Knowledge, Assessors 3 and 4 are the only assessors (two out of the four) valuing this type of knowledge. With regards to the focal research question, it must be noted that all four assessors value organisational/workplace learning.

Internal Tacit

From Figure 9 and Table 6 it would appear that all the assessors recognised each candidate's work experience. The assessors described this evidence in the assessor and moderator reports as follows: "Work Carried Out" (Assessor 1, Candidates A & B), "Portfolio of Work going back 7 years" (Assessor 2, Candidate C), Job Designation and Functions (Assessor 3, Candidate D), CV detailing the Job Description and function (Assessor 4, Candidates E &F). Assessor 2's description of Candidate C's Challenge Test (used in the assessment) as a "Challenge Test to prove work competency." (Assessor 3, Candidate C), is an indication that Assessor 2 is selecting and using the assessment tools to elicit the type of work experience that Candidate C has acquired. This is further evidence that Assessor 2 is recognising the candidate's work experience. All the assessors referenced work experience can therefore be said to be valuing Internal Tacit Knowledge.

External Codified

Three of the four Assessors (1, 3 and 4) mentioned external courses that the Candidates (B,D and E) had completed. Whilst the portfolios of Candidates A and F contain information on short courses, these were not mentioned by Assessors 1 and 4 in the reports. Assessors 2 and 4 mentioned the subject 'Survey 2' (Candidate C), as well as the partially-completed BTech results of Candidate F. All four assessors referenced some type of External Codified Knowledge – either external short courses or full qualifications – in their Assessment and Moderation Reports.

External Tacit

No reference to External Tacit Knowledge could be found in the Assessment and Moderation Reports, despite the fact that there was evidence of this in the portfolios.

The Summary of the evaluation of the Assessment and Moderation Reports

It is clear from Table 6 that in the Assessment and Moderation Reports, the assessors placed a high value on workplace learning (Internal Tacit and Internal Codified knowledge) and, to a lesser degree, on External Codified knowledge. The other aspect that the table highlights is

that Assessors 3 and 4 referenced informal/workplace learning as part of the Moderation and Assessment Reports whereas Assessors 1 and 2 seemed to focus on equivalent course outcomes.

4.4.3 Analysis of Interviews

Drawing on the interviews it is clear that the assessor value experience within the RPL process. The questions below form the basis of five case studies or scenarios described by the assessors during the interviews. These case studies or scenarios shall be used to make explicit the assessors' thoughts on the type of knowledge that is being RPL'd in the institution. The questions in this regard were:

- What type knowledge and skill is assessed? (Case study 1)
- What impact does institutional knowledge have on the RPL process? (Case studies 2 and 3)
- What type of knowledge is the assessor looking for in the portfolio? (Case studies 3 and 4)
- Does the assessor believe that the knowledge being evaluated was sufficient / equivalent to the institution's? (Case study 5)

Assessor 1 (Built Environment) was not considered part of the case studies as Assessor 1 did not answer the questions on the type of knowledge being assessed, but rather on the type of knowledge which is not suitable for RPL. (This is discussed later under Section 4.4.3 Knowledge not for RPL.)

Case study 1 – (Explanation from Assessor 2)

Case study 1 is Assessor 2's (Civil Engineering) explanation when asked what type knowledge and skill is assessed as part of the RPL Process (i.e. what is the hidden knowledge that the assessor looks for?). Assessor 2 explains:

> A candidate looking for recognition of prior learning in project management … now project management is a subject that is extremely difficult to teach …you have the theoretical knowledge that you need, the underpinning knowledge for project management as well as your analytical,... planning …and ...organizational skills etcetera …
> So it's extremely difficult to teach somebody some of the softer skills. You can test it in the application: what it is that they've been involved in, what is it that they've done? So if they can bring projects that they've actually managed themselves from the planning phase all the way through to

> the … implementation phase etcetera, we can then test across and look at the different stages and see what is it that you've actually done, how successful was what you were doing. And … in some cases you will find the candidates far exceed the base knowledge that we teach. 'Cause a lot of the learning that you do, you're learning through implementing that knowledge that you've gained at the University of Technology. We don't teach you everything you need to know; we teach you the base and you build up the rest of your knowledge.
>
> Now to expect somebody to remember [integration and differentiation] twenty years down the line to apply integration and differentiation regardless of your scenario and we now say sorry you're not a technician because you don't know how to do integration and differentiation. When you compartmentalize knowledge it's difficult to assess across levels but when you look at the integrated nature of what we do, then it becomes easier to extract out of one of the examples of the work that the student may have produced, to say there's evidence of problem solving - he's had a go and this is the scenario and the candidate has had to do these steps in order to get a proper solution. The solution was arrived at, or a workable solution was arrived at, so therefore the steps must have been there."(Assessor 2-Civil Engineering)

From the Case study, it is clear that Assessor 2 looks at knowledge in terms of theoretical knowledge, a type of "underpinning knowledge" that underpins the RPL candidate's knowledge at work. From this point of view, the learner learns and gains experience in the workplace. The institution teaches what is viewed as a base knowledge and the learners then move into the workplace and 'learn through implementing'. The type of knowledge that the candidates derive from the workplace (learning through implementation) is "soft skill" knowledge, which is difficult to teach – such as analytical and problem-solving skills.

The assessor goes on to explain that knowledge should not be compartmentalised: "When you compartmentalise knowledge it's difficult to assess across levels," but when it is integrated and problem- based it becomes easier to assess because you don't have to concern yourself with the steps, but rather the accuracy or correctness of the solution.

Case study 2 – (Assessor 2, Candidate C)

Case study 2 is Assessors 2's (Civil Engineering) explanation when asked to what extent Candidate C's having Drawing Level 1 impacted on the outcome of the RPL assessment for Drawing Level 2:

> Drawing level one in his case is a plus; it obviously got him into the company where he was working, but for us Drawings 2 is where you learn the technicalities of Civil Engineering. Drawing 1 is the basic Drawing package; you learn how… it almost interchangeable with Mechanical Drawings 1 [and] with Electrical Drawings 1. There's a very small emphasis on discipline-specific drawings but we're trying to get them to a point where they understand what a drawing looks like, what it means, how to speak the language of drawings. That is Drawing 1. You then go into the more technical aspects of drawing in Drawing 2. Now in his case, because he was taught in-house how to do things in a structural way at his company, Drawings 1 didn't have that much of an impact on the final assessment because what he

> had learnt over the 8 years was far more than what he could have picked up in semester 1 in six months.(Assessor 2-Civil Engineering)

This case study provides further evidence that Assessor 2 believes that the knowledge that the institution teaches can be considered as a base knowledge. The assessor explains that Candidate C, having completed Drawing Level 1, didn't have "an impact on the final assessment because of what he had learnt over the 8 years.*" (employed)* He had learnt far more than he would have learnt in six months from Drawings Level 1.

Case studies 1 and 2 deal with different subject criteria (Project management, Mathematics and even Drawing) but it is evident that the assessor believes that the knowledge taught at the institution underpins the knowledge learnt within the workplace. Also, the knowledge learnt in the workplace often far exceeds the base knowledge that is taught at the institution.

Case study 3 – (Explanation from Assessor 3)

Case study 3 is Assessor 3's (Mechanical Engineering) response when asked what type of knowledge the assessor is looking for in the portfolio. (His duties include looking after the student's experiential learning in the mechanical department.)

> So you were referring to knowledge and how do I do a comparison? What sort of knowledge am I looking for and evidence of that knowledge? So what we have here is our syllabus; we've got our required workplace areas, now there are things like this. Workplace culture, ethics, operational procedure and code of conduct is what we expect any workplace to have. It is not something that we teach them here; it is something that they will learn at the work place, because [in] most cases [they are]workplace specific. When it comes to safety we expect that wherever they work there must be a safety component, there must be safety training that they are made aware of, that we expect the company to do within the first week or so. That's part of the student's orientation at the company. Ja, and then in those of our subjects, except for communication skills and things like that, there is some problem-solving skills component. (Assessor 3 Mechanical Engineering)

Assessor 3 explains that the syllabus has areas that the assessor looks for in the portfolio. These areas are not taught at the institution and therefore can only be found in the workplace. They relate to workplace culture, ethics, code of conduct, safety and operational procedures. The process of identifying this aspect in the portfolios is clear evidence that Assessor 3 is looking to identify workplace knowledge in the portfolios.

Case study 4 – (Explanation from Assessor 3)

Case study 4 is Assessors 3's (Mechanical Engineering) explanation when discussing how the portfolios are evaluated against the syllabus during the RPL assessment.

> …basically what we do to see what knowledge … the students [apply], in most cases it will actually be application of theoretical knowledge they will apply in a practical way at the company. Now when I look at the RPL applicants' summary of work experience, I'm looking for this type of thing. The experience that he has, or the areas that he's been exposed to in the time that he has been working. Has he acquired these? Has he had exposure to these learning areas?
>
> We [are] not looking at him completely mastering all of them, but he must have had some sort of exposure and depending on what the learning area is … we expect the student to have some, even some stores experience…which might not be mechanical engineering specific, but … generic. They must know how to get things from the stores, they must know the company's procurement processes. (Assessor 3 Mechanical Engineering)

From Assessor 3's explanation, it appears that s/he looks for the application of knowledge when assessing the portfolios, ie. knowledge applied in a practical manner. Whilst the application of the knowledge need not be Mechanical Engineering specific, the assessor also looks for generic application of knowledge. For example, in order to perform a mechanical engineering task the learner would be required to procure items. Therefore to identify that the candidate has applied mechanical knowledge, the assessor looks for evidence of procurement.

Case study 5 – (Explanation from Assessor 4)

Case study 5 is Assessor 4's (Electrical Engineering) clarification when asked for an opinion on RPL and whether the assessor would not RPL candidates, given the opportunity to stop the process.

> No, there are definitely cases where a guy's done so much, much broader than what we expect actually in-house[institution]. Not to give him that recognition is … it's devoid of any rationale. So we, as an academic institution, must give recognition not just to internally-generated knowledge but also other knowledge [workplace knowledge]. You have to recognize it. If you don't recognize it we're actually saying: it is not there and the only truth or knowledge that's out there is what we develop internally. So no I think, but that's why I say if its right applied, if it's managed right, I believe institution is managing it correctly now … it's very valuable. (Assessor 4 Electrical Engineering)

Assessor 4 explains that the candidates often have much more knowledge than the institution requires of its students, and not to recognise the "other knowledge" (workplace knowledge) is denying that workplace knowledge exists. It would appear that Assessor 4 has given this aspect thought and is looking for "other knowledge" (workplace knowledge) when conducting the assessments.

The types of knowledge that the assessors indicate they assessed in the Case studies, as part of the RPL process, have been plotted against the Hopkins and Maglen Organisational Learning Model (Figure 10).

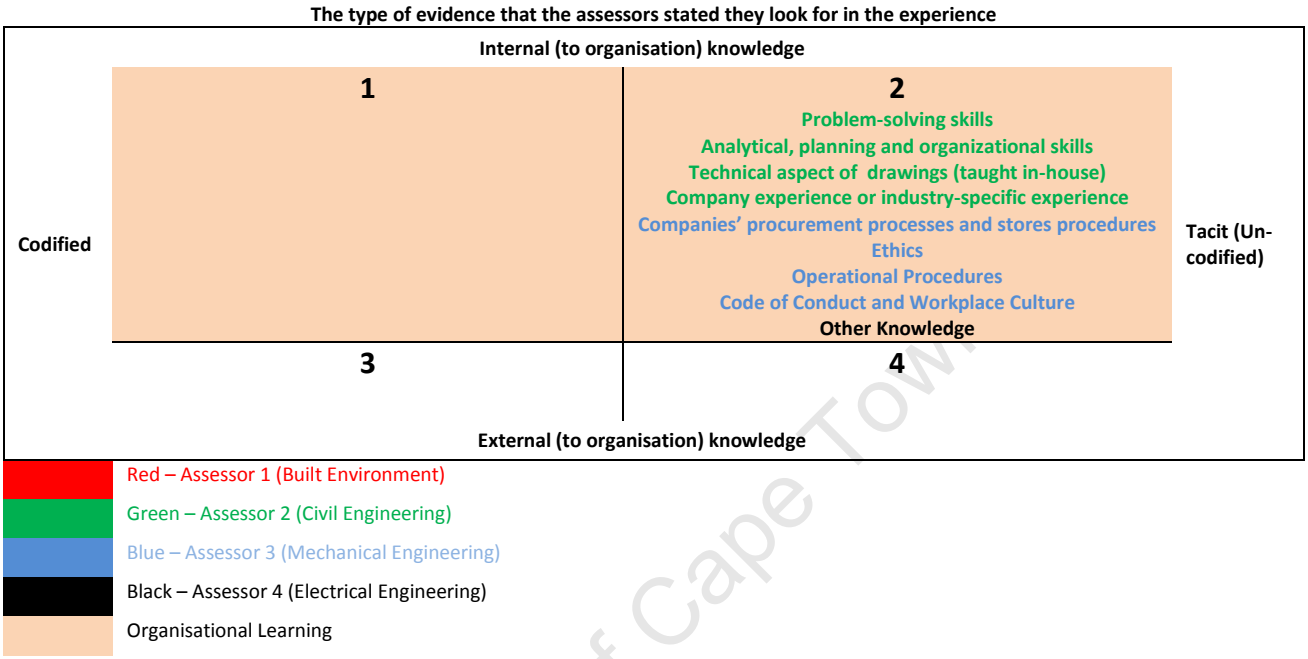


Figure 10: The type of knowledge being assessed with reference to Hopkins and Maglen Organisational Learning.

It is evident from this grid that three of the four assessors (Assessors 2, 3, and 4), look for evidence of Internal Tacit knowledge when they assess RPL candidates. Assessor 1's response was vague with regards to the type of knowledge that the assessors look for.

Knowledge not for RPL

The following are the responses from the assessors when asked what knowledge they would not RPL:

- Assessor 1 (Built Environment):"It's quantity surveying because it's a skill, … we get requests and we've always refused or referred them to go lower down in the levels…it's a skill that you acquire over the years, you know, measuring and pricing and estimating. So we will not RPL somebody into the BTech for that … being an undergraduate quantity surveying subject."

- Assessor 1 (Built Environment):"If somebody comes into first year ... I think it's maths, if somebody comes into first year and they don't have maths, then that would be a no-no."
- Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering) stated "Whole qualification."
- Assessor 4(Electrical Engineering) indicated "RPLing subjects such as Mathematics."

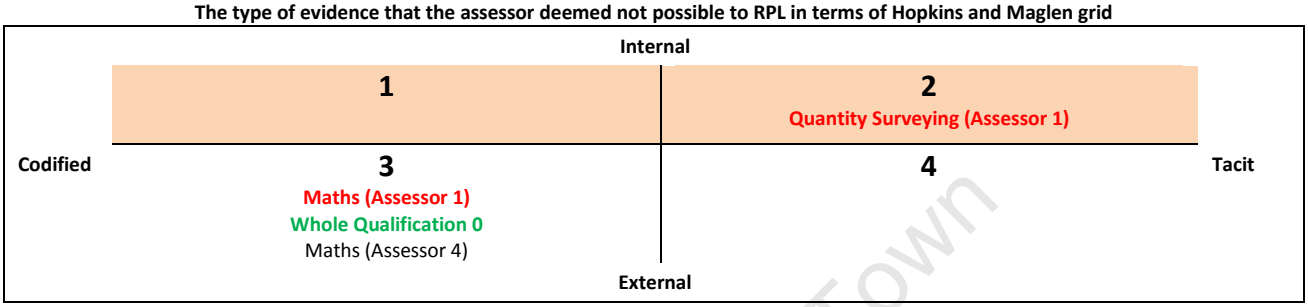


Figure 11 Hopkins and Maglen Grid - knowledge the assessors will not RPL

Internal Codified

No evidence could be found that the assessors were unwilling to assess Internal Codified knowledge. Therefore it can be assumed that assessors do assess Internal Codified knowledge during the RPL process and further, they value this type of knowledge.

Internal Tacit

The response of Assessor 1 (below) with regards to the type of knowledge that the assessor will not RPL is perhaps the most controversial:

> It's quantity surveying because it's a skill, … we get requests and we've always refused or referred them to go lower down in the levels… it's a skill that you acquire over the years, you know measuring and pricing and estimating, so we will not RPL somebody into the BTech for that …being an undergraduate quantity surveying subject. (Assessor 1 - Built Environment)

SAQA (2002) explains that the process of recognising prior learning is the identifying of the knowledge and skill of the learner and referencing the knowledge and skill to specific unit

standards or outcomes. Furthermore the institution's RPL website says that RPL-ing for advanced standing is when "a person's skills and knowledge are assessed against the learning outcomes of a specific subject or subjects" (I-Website).Yet, Assessor 1 states that he/she will not RPL Quantity Surveying "because it is a skill" - a skill that is acquired over years. If a candidate has worked in this field it is not clear why the skill could not be recognised.

External Codified

Assessors 1 and 4 both indicated that they would not RPL Mathematics as a subject. The reason for this appears to be that Mathematics is a fundamental subject in most engineering fields, and it is also not a subject that can be easily learnt in the workplace. Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering) indicated that s/he would not RPL a whole qualification, but this is in line with the institution's RPL Policy and Residency Clause. (See Section: 'Recognition of Prior Learning at the Institution'.)

External Tacit

No evidence could be found that the assessors were unwilling to assess External Tacit knowledge, but neither could evidence be found in interviews or moderators reports that the assessors did assess it. The only evidence found of this knowledge was what the candidates presented in their portfolios.

4.5 Attitude towards RPL

While everything at the institution points to the institution conducting RPL successfully (through their RPL policy, the RPL process, academics who are assigned the task of performing RPL in their departments and the marketing of RPL), it appears that not all the stakeholders are happy with the RPL process. The assessors were asked during the interview session whether:

- they were happy with RPL the process.
- they would continue implementing RPL if given the opportunity to stop RPL-ing candidates.

SAQA requires that all assessors undergo training in conducting RPL assessments, but because the institution falls under the ambit of HE, the assessors do not have to be formally trained. To conduct the assessments, the assessor is required to be "appointed as an academic … be an expert in his field." They must have the same qualification, or a higher one than the qualification they are assessing.

In 2006 and 2007, the HRPL and her manager attempted to conduct training sessions for the RPL assessors, "to introduce them to RPL," but unfortunately, "There weren't actually any takers, which was very heart-breaking." This situation prompted the RPL Unit to take a different approach. When RPL applications are received, the HRPL facilitates the RPL process with the academic: "I sit with the academic and say, listen, here's your application, this is what the person wants, how are you going to deal with it, what assessment are you going to do?" (HRPL)

In addition to facilitating the RPL process, the institution has also instituted a training programme that is compulsory for newly-appointed academics. The purpose of the training programme is to train the academic on "how to lecture and how to draw up a test and how to do and RPL assessment*."*(HRPL)

This is contrary to the comments of the HRPL, Assessor 1 (Built Environment) who stated*: "*I've never had training; no-one has ever offered me training." Whilst this statement was not checked for accuracy, the following HRPL comment sums up the assessor's response to RPL: "There are certain departments that work very well and I've really brought people around you know, and they're saying thank you for your help and so on... But there are other departments – nothing!" (HRPL)

This statement is further reflected in the assessors' personal opinions and feelings with regards to RPL

Assessor 1 (Built Environment), believes that the RPL process is conducted in an impromptu fashion, with "everybody doing" what they like. S/he felt that the RPL unit

cannot advise people from Civil engineering, Architecture, Clothing design to Business. The process is deemed not to be a "very educational, academic way of doing things." The process should be standardised, under professional bodies such as the Engineering Council of SA.

With regards to emotions or feelings towards RPL, it appears as if there is resentment about having to conduct RPL. Assessor 1 stated that "I was thrown into this." There is also a sense of worry concerning colleagues' opinions of the assessor– for example, when the RPL candidates do not fare well at the institution. Assessor 1 explains further:

> "I actually wouldn't like that responsibility because my colleagues thought he was RPLed, because he's much older … and I said no, he … met all the minimum requirements."

Assessor 1 did not like the idea that his/her colleagues thought s/he allowed the learner access to the institution via the RPL process. Given the choice, Assessor 1 "wouldn't touch it [RPL] with a ten foot barge pole." S/he would stop the process.

Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering) would continue to assess candidates on a "case by case" basis if given the option to stop. This assessor's feelings on the process are changeable and are dependent "on what day you talk to me." This view is caused by his/her frustration towards candidates who start the process, have the initial discussions, the investment of time, and then withdraw, but "when you have a student walking across the stage getting their diploma, then it's worth it."

Assessor 3's(Mechanical Engineering) comments can best be described by the assessor's statement "I don't think it's a waste of time, I will carry on doing it until somebody stops me."

Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering):"I think it's a valuable tool … and it has … been formalised and allowed to mature through the faculty office, through Senate, and the RPL Unit which manages the process effectively. If applied correctly, no academic knowledge is less important than practical knowledge or vice versa. Although Assessor 4 is hesitant to accept RPL candidates into the post graduate programmes, when asked if he/she would

stop RPL: *"*Some of the brightest physicists and entrepreneurs of yesteryear didn't have proper or formal schooling."

In conclusion, there appears to be a correlation between the opinions of assessors (2,3,4) who see the RPL process as a necessary process and they would continue RPL-ing candidates. Assessors 2, 3 and 4 believe in the RPL process and the portfolios their candidates produce are comprehensive and rich with evidence. The assessors could also readily answer questions with regards to the portfolios they assessed. In contrast to the other assessors, Assessor 1 (Built Environment):

- would stop conducting RPL assessments, given the opportunity;
- was guarded in discussions on Candidates B's portfolio;
- referred to evidence that could not be found in Candidate A's and B's portfolio; and
- was loath to assess candidates in Quantity Surveying.

4.6 Summary of Chapter

The institution has a defined RPL process and system which has been developed in order for the institution to align itself to governmental policies. Assessors 2, 3 and 4 are fundamentally happy with the RPL process and believe that the process adds value, but Assessor 1 believes that the process should be more structured.

The institution makes use of a variety of tools during the assessment process, but relies on the candidate's portfolio of evidence as the primary source of evidence as it contains a variety of data relating to the candidate's formal work experience (i.e. examples of projects completed, CV's, letters, photos etc.)The interviews with the assessors highlighted that they value experience and workplace knowledge during the RPL process.

In the following figures, I have simplified and condensed the data from figures 8,9,10 and 11 in terms of what aspects the assessors appear to place value on, in their RPL assessments:

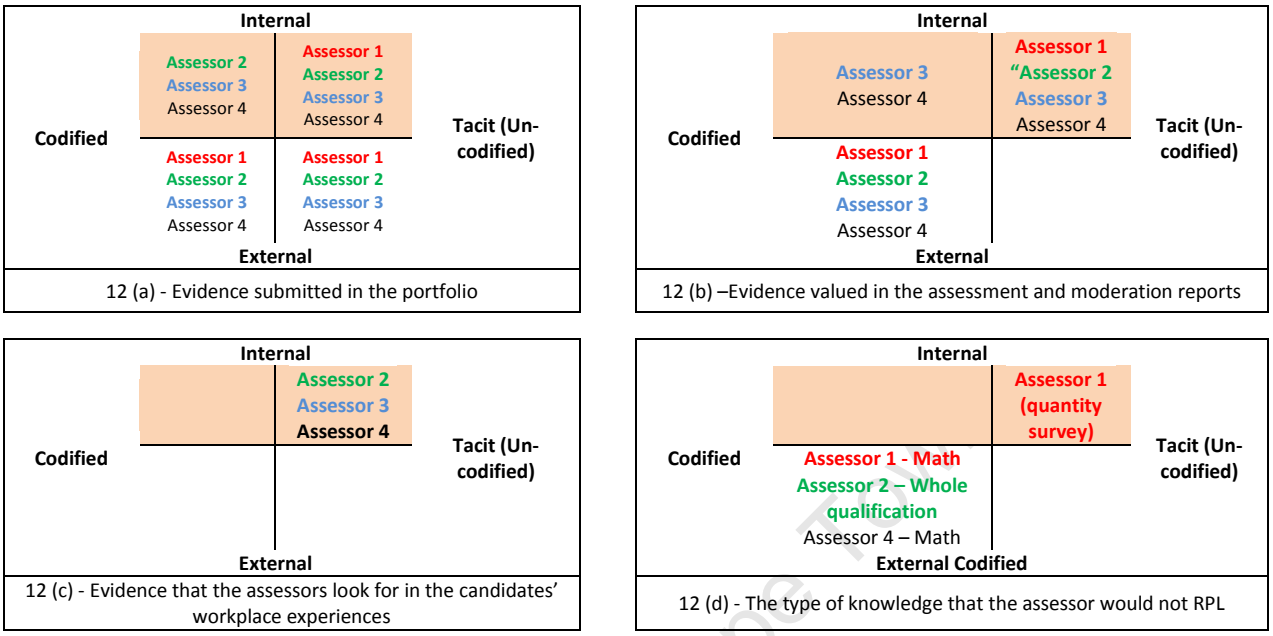


Figure 12 Consolidation of the Hopkins and Maglen figures in terms of assessor.

From this graphic representation of the data the following has been concluded:

Figure 12(a): The portfolios contain a variety of evidence and as the assessors guided the candidates in the portfolio development, it would appear that the assessors valued all types of knowledge and learning. This is with the exception of Assessor 1 (Built Environment), whose candidates' portfolios contained no evidence of Internal Codified knowledge.

Figure 12(b): In the Assessment and Moderation Reports, the assessors described a variety of evidence submitted by the learner. From this data, it appears that all the assessors value Internal Tacit and External Codified knowledge. Assessors 3 and 4 also value Internal Codified knowledge.

Figure 12(c): When the assessors were asked about the types of knowledge and experience they looked for in the candidates, Assessors 2, 3, and 4 appeared to value Internal Tacit only.

Figure 12(d): When asked what the assessors would not RPL, the responses received indicated that they would not RPL Internal Tacit and External Codified knowledge. This however, contradicted the other data summary in figures 12(b) and 12(c). Here the assessors referred to specific aspects that they would not RPL. Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering) mentioned a whole qualification, yet in terms of the RPL policy, the assessor could not do so because of the institution's Residency Clause. The assessor also indicated that s/he would look to RPL all types of experience and knowledge. Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering) referred to Mathematics as an exception, but s/he would RPL all other forms of knowledge and experience. Assessor 1 (Built Environment) would not RPL Quantity Surveying and Mathematics.

This chapter provides clear evidence that the assessors, by valuing Internal Codified and Internal Tacit knowledge, value workplace learning (organisational knowledge).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which the process of Recognition of Prior Learning in a University of Technology's Engineering Faculty, recognises and accredits knowledge acquired through work experience. The focus and challenge of this study was not centred around 'who' was conducting RPL for the purposes of awarding credits (for specific outcomes, based on qualifications) nor even 'how', but rather asked:

- What type of knowledge is being assessed and awarded the formal recognition that the RPL process claims to provide?
- What kind of knowledge, gained at which type(s) of institution(s), gets preference(workplaces, training centres, universities, and so on)?

In order to understand and provide a context for the answer to the research question, the following background issues were probed:

- The purpose of the RPL with regards to the type of perspective from which it is being conducted (i.e. Technical/Market or Liberal/Humanistic etc.)
- The mode of RPL assessment with regards to the assessment tools used to assess the learners.

Each of the above bullet points is discussed in this chapter drawing on the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) model to differentiate between different forms of knowledge. The chapter also identifies some limitations to this study, and aspects that may be considered for future research. It concludes with my personal view of RPL as a practice after having completed this study.

5.2 The assessment tools used

From the findings, it appears that the assessment tools were selected on the basis of what was going to be assessed. Assessors selected the tools dependent on the subject or course outcomes for which RPL was requested. The tools used in the RPL process in this study were: challenge tests, interviews, and the portfolio which contained the CV, peer reports

and testimonials, academic records, evidence of short courses, job descriptions and work projects. The portfolio was the primary source of evidence for the assessment and was used to provide comprehensive evidence of the candidate's workplace and formal institutional learning.

5.3 The purpose of the RPL assessment

The purpose of the RPL assessment conducted at this University of Technology seems to correspond with two of the perspectives identified by Breier (2008:28-33) (2003: 17-25). The first perspective identified is the "Technical/Market" perspective, where practical experience is assessed against specific outcomes for the purpose of skills development. In terms of the assessments conducted in this study this happened through the granting of Advanced standing where the candidate's skills and knowledge were assessed against outcomes of a specific subject or qualification. Further evidence of the "Technical/Market" perspective were the tools used in the assessments: portfolios and challenge tests. The second perspective identified is the "Liberal/Humanist" or the Institutional Access RPL, where the purpose of the assessment is to provide learners with access into formal learning programmes for the purposes of their own development. Here the assessment assesses broader competence.

5.4 Type of knowledge assessed and awarded formal recognition

Given that the assessors guided the candidates in their portfolio development, it could be assumed that the evidence presented in the portfolios reflected the knowledge that the assessors value. However, whilst the assessors guided the candidates in the development of their portfolios, the portfolio was compiled by the learner, who might have included evidence not requested, or omitted evidence that the assessor required or requested.

Comparing portfolios with the data from the Assessment and Moderation reports, it would appear that all the assessors value Internal Tacit and External Codified knowledge, whilst Assessors 3 and 4 also valued Internal Codified knowledge. When interviewed, and questioned, with regards to the type of knowledge and experience they look for in the candidates, Assessors 2, 3 and 4 appeared to value Internal Tacit Knowledge.

This study provides evidence that the assessors value External Codified, Internal Codified and Internal Tacit knowledge. The study's purpose was to identify whether the assessors value workplace knowledge using the definition of workplace knowledge as developed in Chapter Two (drawing on Hopkins and Maglen, 2000): that is, Internal Codified and Internal Tacit Knowledge. It may be concluded that the RPL assessors at this University of Technology do value workplace learning (organisational knowledge).

Breier (2011: 205-208) in her earlier work (1997, 1999), writes of the difficulties in recognising informal knowledge in formal HE. By contrast, Degraff-Mazzaza's (2010: 100) research concluded that, during the RPL assessment, the assessors are looking for a broader type of knowledge than institutional (theoretical) knowledge. This study supports Degraff-Mazzaza's (2010) study that the recognition of prior experiential, workplace knowledge is possible within the higher education context.

5.5 The Contribution of the Study

This study may contribute to RPL candidates' understanding of the value of their workplace knowledge as a means for entrance into HE via RPL. It could highlight to RPL assessors, the value of workplace knowledge. It could also help to guide educators or providers who wish to implement RPL within their institutions in identifying the types of knowledge that they are able to RPL.

With regards to research on RPL, Breier (2011: 200) contends that RPL in SA has been widely studied and published. However, the amount of research done is out of proportion to the practices of RPL, as there has been limited implementation and many of the publications have been written around a small number of interventions. This study will add to the understanding of RPL practices and how RPL is understood and implemented in HE institutions in South Africa. It provides insights into the assessors' readiness to recognise and accept workplace knowledge.

Breier (2011: 205-208) describes a mode of research to "conceptualise and guide practice." This study has operationalised a conceptual framework (Hopkins &Maglen) to identify the type of knowledge that assessors and institutions recognise and accredit through their RPL practices. Although this conceptual framework has limitations (dealt with in more detail below), it is nevertheless hoped that this study will provide future researchers with a methodology to research further on what kinds of knowledge are valued in RPL practices.

5.6 Limitations of study and need for future research

The study highlighted a number of practical aspects relating to implementation that could be considered for future research with regards to RPL. For example, during the analysis of the portfolios, a number of aspects were noted regarding the evidence submitted that had no bearing on this study but which could be considered for future research. These are:

1. The question of the authenticity of the evidence: how certain can the assessors be that the work/projects submitted in the portfolio are indeed the learner's own work?
2. The sufficiency of evidence: how much evidence is sufficient when assessing a candidate?
3. Bias or subjectivity: how does the assessor's own bias affect the RPL award?
4. Records of interviews: Interviews with the candidates were conducted by assessors during the RPL assessment, but no record of these interviews existed. Therefore the influence of these interviews on the judgements made could not be determined. What influence do these interviews have, versus the influence of the portfolios on the assessor's judgement?

Although this study provides a framework for identifying the types of knowledge that assessors and institutions recognise and accredit through their RPL practices, the Hopkins and Maglen (2000) Workplace Learning Strategies Model for Organisational Learning, used as the conceptual framework, was found to have limitations, some of which could be considered for future research.

1. I experienced a lack of clarity as to whether each quadrant is referring to the type of learning involved, or whether it is referring to the form of knowledge involved. For

example although I categorised projects as 'informal knowledge' because the learning took place informally, projects may have contained internal and external codified knowledge.

2. Greater clarity is needed as to how evidence (for example, in a portfolio) can be 'counted' or weighted.
3. The definitions of Internal, External, Tacit and Codified knowledge need to be further refined.

5.7 Conclusion

I believe that this study has shown that assessors in the institution do value workplace knowledge. However, in assessing this knowledge, the assessor has to assess Tacit (un-codified) knowledge by drawing out the experiences and educational history of the candidate. This process of trying to identify knowledge that is Tacit and Un-codified is difficult for the assessor. It is also difficult for the candidate to express this Tacit, Un-codified experience, based on workplace knowledge.

RPL is not an exact science but it is an act of recognition of the candidate's experience, workplace knowledge and skill. Breier (2011: 205- 208) writes that Breier (1997, 1999) wrote of complications in recognising informal knowledge in formal HE. This study, while not claiming that RPL is easy, nevertheless shows that it can be implemented successfully in particular areas of the HE context. When questioned about the knowledge learnt outside of an institution, Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering) responded:

> Some of the brightest physicists and entrepreneurs of yesteryear didn't have proper or formal schooling, so I will objectively look at the RPL coming to me … and lots of experience and innovations so you have to trade it off.

What Assessor 4 alludes to here is that throughout history, many inventions such as the light bulb and the telephone were developed by individuals outside of formal institution. Not to recognise the learning and knowledge that formed the basis of these types of innovations would be a loss to our collective knowledge. Following from this, for formal institutions not to recognise un-codified knowledge would invalidate the RPL process. And I

believe that RPL is a valid process that should be given its place in the educational framework.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter to the Senior Professor and Chair of Postgraduate Studies

M E Denton
25 Wapenplyn Street
Bothasig
7441

19 August 2009

[redacted]
Senior Professor and Chair of Postgraduate Studies
Faculty of Engineering
[redacted]

Dear Professor Makinde:

Request for permission to conduct research, and ethics clearance in the Faculty of Engineering

My name is Mark Edwin Denton; I am a second year master student at the University of Cape Town (student number DNTMAR002). My field of study is Adult Education, and my area of interest is the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). More specifically my interest lies in the RPL in the engineering sector because I have being involved in technical training for the passed eleven years within the [redacted] training department.

The purpose of this letter is two fold, firstly to request permission to be allowed to conduct the research based on the research proposal at your institution. And secondly, should permission be granted for access to [redacted] Faculty of Engineering as a site, I request permission to seek ethics clearance.

The title of my research proposal is: *"To what extent, does Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in a University of Technology's Engineering Faculty, recognise informal learning and knowledge acquired informally through work experience for the purposes of accreditation/advanced credit?"*

Please find attached my research proposal for your perusal and dissemination. I trust that this meets with your approval. Should you require additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

M E Denton

[redacted]

Mark Denton

From: [redacted]
Sent: 20 October 2009 07:47 AM
To: Mark Denton; [redacted] HREC
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: RE: FW: Permission to conduct research at [redacted]

Dear Mark

I informed [redacted] that the Faculty research meeting approved your request on condition that you contact the various Heads of Departments to do your research in their specific departments.

Regards

[redacted]

>>> Mark Denton <Mark.Denton@capetown.gov.za> 2009/10/20 07:42 AM >>>

Morning [redacted]

Are you able to give me an answer with regards to my request?

Regards

Mark

Appendix B: Email to Assessor

Mark Denton

From: Mark Denton
Sent: 24 November 2010 02:22 PM
To: [redacted] Assessor 4
Cc: [redacted] HRPL
Subject: RE: Fwd: FW: General Assessor Interview Questions .doc

Good Afternoon

Thanks very much, can I propose the 13 December at 10h00, if this is not possible I will accept any other time for the meeting.

Regards

Mark
[redacted]

-----Original Message-----
[redacted]
Sent: 24 November 2010 12:33 PM
[redacted] HRPL
Cc: Mark Denton
Subject: Re: Fwd: FW: General Assessor Interview Questions .doc

[redacted]

I will gladly assist, but I'm literally booked up to 10 December! If this is not too late, I can accommodate him thereafter.

Regards
[redacted]

>>> [redacted] 11/24/2010 12:25 PM >>>
Afternoon [redacted]

I know you are both busy, but do you think you could assist this student from UCT? He did get permission from the FRC to conduct research on advanced standing in RPL and he has been working with me with regard to the collection of data

Do you think you could spare him an hour or so? He has the portfolios with him of the RPLs that he would like to include in his research.

Kind regards

[redacted]

>>> Mark Denton [redacted] 2010/11/22 07:14 AM >>>

Good Day

My name is Mark Edwin Denton; I am a second year master student at the University of Cape Town (student number DNTMAR002). My field of study is Adult Education, and my area of interest is the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). More specifically my interest lies in the RPL in the engineering sector because I have being involved in technical training for the passed eleven years within the [redacted].

I have being granted permission to conduct the research at your institutionThe title of my research proposal is: "To what extent, does Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in a University of Technology's Engineering Faculty, recognise informal learning and knowledge acquired informally through work experience for the purposes of accreditation/advanced credit?".
Would it be possible for me to interview you with regards to my research, (attached is the list of primary questions for the interview).
The interview is approximately an hour in length.

If you agree to my request would it be possible to conduct the interviews within the next two weeks.

Regards
Mark Denton
[redacted]

Appendix C: Generic Interview questions

Interview Questions Assessor 2 – Candidates C

Assessor background

1. How long have you being involved in RPL

The Assessment Process

1. Can you briefly explain the assessment process of Institution?
2. How long does the RPL process take to conclude?
3. For what purposes is RPL conducted at Institution?
4. When is it decided what the purpose of RPL should be (i.e. Access / Advanced standing)
5. What is the residency clause and what is its impact on RPL and the purpose for which RPL is conducted
6. Who decides on the type of assessment that is conducted with the candidate? *(See first interview R2 – 4:19min) "test / portfolio")*
    a. Is there a database or battery of tasks / questions developed per subject or outcome of the qualification? Or is this developed after discussion with the learners
    b. How are these tasks/tools developed, what cognisance is taken of informal learning when developing these tasks
    c. How the assessment is conducted (What memo / mark sheet / manner are used to assess these tasks)?
7. Is there a tool or method that is used to match the learning outcomes of the qualification/ subject/module against a specific task:
    a. if yes, what tool is used?
8. Are different assessment processes used for workplace learning as opposed to advance standing or access?
9.

Language

1. In what language/s is the assessment conducted?
    a. What language is appropriates during the RPL process;
        i. Is local workplace language acceptable?
        ii. Must the learners responses be "institutionally correct" (Meggar / Insulation Resistance Tester)

Learning Knowledge and skill

1. What type of skill, knowledge and experience should be reflected in a learners POE
2. What type of learning, skills knowledge or experience is being assessed when RPL is conducted for the purposes of advanced standing
3. What type of learning, skills knowledge or experience is being assessed when RPL is conducted for the purposes of access into a learning programme
4. What type of learning do you believe is best suited for RPL (Institutional knowledge and learning, workplace knowledge or learning?

Changing Landscape in the institution with regards to RPL

1. The candidate was assessed in 2008/2009 – what are you doing differently today to that has changed as part of the RPL process?

Some issues in RPL debates

1. Do individual assessors differ in the manner / complexity of assessment that determines if the individuals' learner gains access or advanced standing?
    a. Would another assessor assessing this POE obtain the same result, or could there be difference of opinion.
2. What type of skills, knowledge and experience do candidates lack when they are RPL'd
3. What do you see as the important admission requirements for RPL
    d. During the RPL assessments that you have conducted how many persons have had learning at the appropriate level?
    e. Do you think that learners entering the learning programmes with RPL require additional learning
4. In the Final analysis of the Portfolio , what is the role of the HOD?
5. What type of learning do you believe cannot be awarded RPL?
6. Do you believe that the candidates benefit from the RPL process? (Ensure that the answer is motivated.)
7. Are learning programmes being developed in order for persons who have being RPL , are able to "participate effectively
8. In your experience what type of learners do best in the learning programmes as INSTITUTION;
    a. Adult learners , with experience knowledge and skills or
    b. Learners straight from school.
9. What is your opinion of RPL (Does it work)

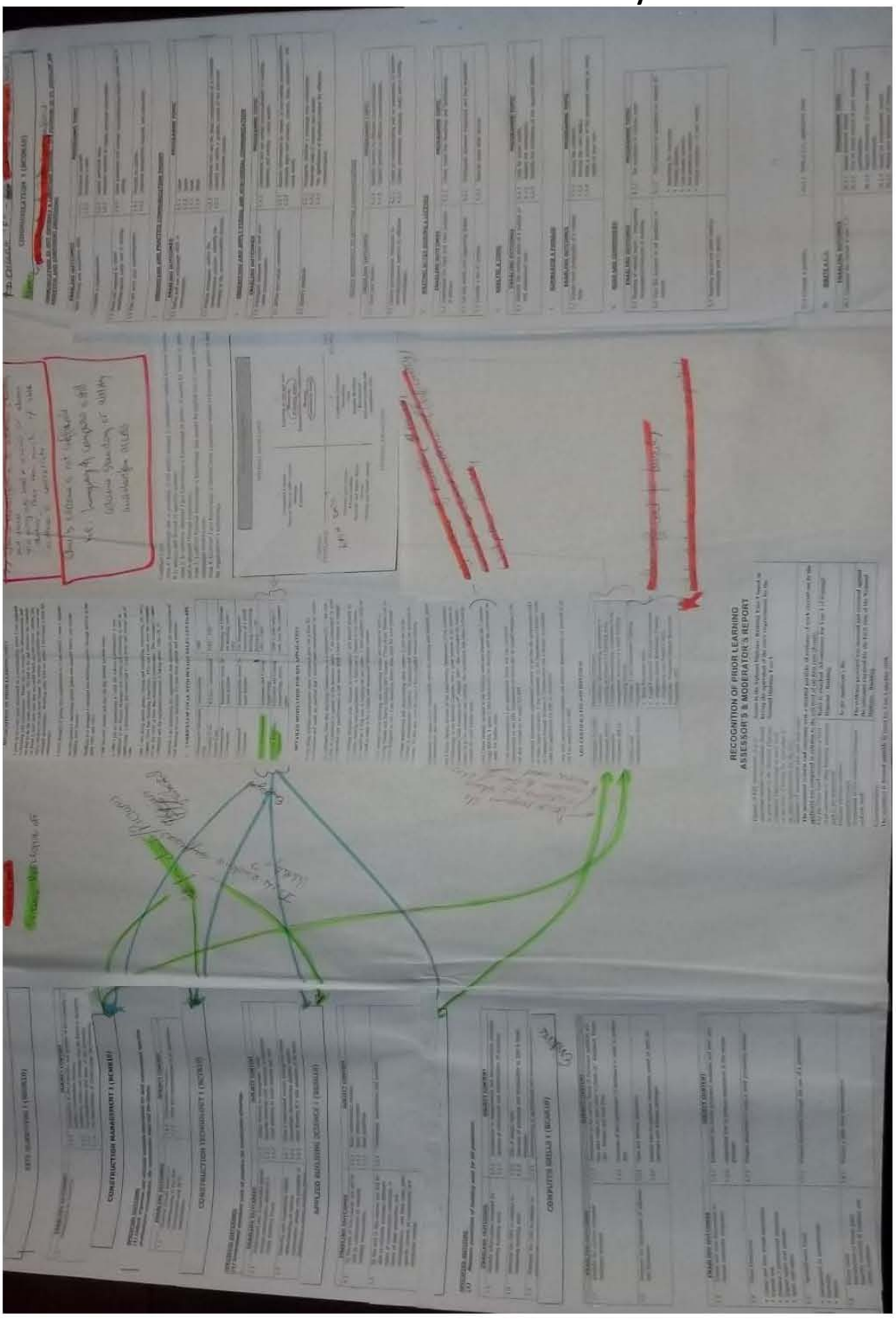
AppendixD: Specific Interview questions

Interview Questions Assessor 2 – Candidates C

The Portfolio, (with reference to the candidates POE)

1. How much assistance / guidance is provided to the candidate in developing his portfolio
2. With regards to the application, on what experience of the candidate was the application accepted, for RPL
    a. How do you decided if you are going to allow a candidate to be RPL'd
    b. *(See first interview R2- 4:19Min – "sufficient and relevant work experience")*
3. With reference to Candidates 3 portfolio
    a. What RPL tools were used for the purposes of the assessment?
    b. Must the candidate have completed all the institutional training for a "s" level before they can be awareded the practical 1 or practical 2 etc.
    c. When assessing the portfolio, how much evidence is deemed sufficient?
        i. The portfolio contains a lot of power point presentations
    d. Must the candidate display evidence of all the outcomes as per the subject (P1 / P2)
        i. See use of tools
        ii. Draughting standards (how are the drawings assessed)
        iii. Participate in group activities
    e. With reference to candidates 3 POE can you identify the learning that was deemed important to award the status
4. How is the validity of the evidence assessed and assured (the candidates own work)

Appendix E: Photo of cross referencing of exit level outcomes against moderation and learners' educational and work history.



Appendix F: Interview Schedule

The interview programme that was followed:

Interview	Date	Venue	Comment
Head RPL Unit	23 October 2009	RPL Unit Offices	Interview and obtained portfolios for valuation
Assessor 1 (Built Environment)	7 May 2010	Assessor's 1 office	Assessor forgot about the interview
Assessor 1 (Built Environment)	17 May 2010	Assessor's 1 office	Interviewed Completed
Assessor 2 (Civil Engineering)	17 November 2010	Assessor's 2 office	Interviewed Completed
Assessor 3	7 December 2010	Assessor's 3 office	Interviewed Completed
Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering)	13 December 2010	Assessor's 4 office	Assessor forgot about the interview
Assessor 4 (Electrical Engineering)	15 December 2010	Assessor's 4 office	Interviewed Completed

Appendix G: Assessor and Moderator Report.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING
ASSESSOR'S & MODERATOR'S REPORT

Name of the applicant:	[redacted]
Name/s of the assessor/s:	[redacted]
Department:	Mechanical Engineering
Purpose of RPL assessment: *(e.g. to determine whether the candidate should be given access to the National Diploma: Electrical Engineering at entry level on the basis of having the outcomes of the entry requirements for the ND.)*	To determine whether the candidate should be exempted from Mechanical Engineering Practice 1 and 2 (P1 and P2) on the basis of having sufficient relevant experience to satisfy the requirements listed in the syllabus (App A) and Overall Competence Assessment (App D) contained in the Mechanical Engineering Learning Manual for an service trainee.
Summary of assessment plan: (tool/s used)	RPL Structured Questionnaire Interview Portfolio of Evidence
List the Entry level competences or Exit level outcomes or other learning outcomes used in the assessment[1]	Syllabus and Overall Competency Assessment form (attached to this report).
Indicate relevant evidence presented/provided	Portfolio of Evidence
Assessment of the evidence (Comment on methods used)	Compared Portfolio of evidence and CV to required outcomes Sufficient overlap found.
Recommendation: I strongly recommend that candidate be given RPL	
Rationale for the recommendation: The candidate exceeds the requirements for P2	
Assessor's signature: [redacted]	Date: 04/06/09

[1] "Entry level competences": The level of competence required for entry into a qualification. "Exit level outcomes": as specified in the qualification.

Reasons for acceptance of the evidence: Student shows expertise and competence in all outcomes for P1 and P2.	
Moderator's signature: [redacted]	Date: 05/06/09
Recommendation by Head of Department/ RPL Panel by Committee:	
Signature:	Date:

Appendix H: Transcript of Assessor Interview

Interview 3: Assessor 4 Date: 15 Dec 2010 Start Time:10h00 Present: M Denton, Assessor 4
Legend BLUE – Mark Denton Black – Assessor Green – My Comments on interview Red – Recording Times

Ok, I'm just going to ask some background questions. Um I'd like some background of some background with regards to yourself and then also how long have you been involved in RPL?
Ok. I must answer you
Yes just some background
Ur 2006 was when I started
In RPL?
And ja and RPL, not what you want to hear, I think I've only done 3 RPL's in my role as ….meeting organizer.
Ok and they were largely then candidate E & F,
And Carelse
Ok I don't know Carelse so. Ok
That's the newest one.
Ok
Also very old one that one so, the latest one. I started at INSTITUTION um 1st April 2003 and currently I'm associate professor and I'm programme director of the satellite systems projects.
Ok. I actually find that quit interesting, I was reading about that on the net the other day.
Oh really, that's very interesting, I didn't even know.
Um OK. Then can you briefly explain the assessment process for RPL at INSTITUTION? How would, when, lets say for instance um how do you get the candidates, how do you take the candidates through the process?
Uh Fredericka basically um before the RPL office was started this is now probably the very first one, the students came to us with a cover letter requesting RPL for certain subjects or the standing of a Btech, you know if they wanna go continue to….. um so and then of course we have this assessors moderator write a report where they have to give a CV um a portfolio um supporting the RPL that they want and that's usually for projects for instance it will be all the projects they've done professionally um but we require quit a significant amount of detail um and we tell the candidate you know this is the assessment criteria lets say for projects 4 or for a typical this is the exit level outcomes that you need competencies for Btech for instance, so you must address those, we must see from your CV from the interview from the portfolio that you're um satisfy those requirements in the end so we give those guidelines and then they come back with er with er a cover letter formally stating what they want um with a CV the portfolio that we go through after that we do the interview um where we've looked as a panel at everything that he submitted and then of course he does a presentation and we ask him questions.
Ok.
So it's a fairly vigorous procedure, that's now been formalized through Fredericka's office.

But the presentation do you specify the topic they must present to you or do they it's of their own choice?

Oh um it depends it will depend on the subject level or orja that's been RPL'd um mostly it was projects 4 was sort of an outstanding issue for me, so it was typically a project um um related presentation he does, and I give them the guidelines that we give to our own students in terms of time in terms of what you need to cover ….. so. Ja no beforehand I I um I Iwell not inform them, verbally communicate what's required from them at that meeting. And sometimes the presentation is not I mean one can quickly see from the CV and just talking to the candidate you know where it fits in um and then the presentation is either just a presentation with a few short questions or it could be longer with more probing questions.

OK. And the process for RPL the RPL process from start to finish, how long would you say it takes the candidate?

That's a bit difficult to decide um um because RPL is signed off by a senate, the senate only sits 4 times a year.

4 times a year. So in the time period that they could take to to have lets say done senate would they be able to complete the subject? Let's say from start to finish when, lets say it's an unlucky candidate and he …..

It could take a semester ja.

It could take a semester?

44:28

Ja, ja it's ja I mean if you compare that way it may just as well have done the course it that's what you're asking. You know the RPL is not a quick process by no means. I mean from the word that I receive or the panel now has received a request from the RPL or from where Fredericka forwards it to me I don't know what happens before how long that takes, because she goes through a certain process with the students then it comes to us we evaluate and that will at least take a month which is difficult to get everyone together and to go through the material. Then it goes through department faculty and senate or senate itself and that depends on when they sit, it's not something that's pushed through.

So why would candidates do it then it it's such a lengthy process, would you think, what benefits do they get out of it?

Well they don't need to be physically enrolled for a subject.

But cost wise?

I mean they do the RPL and then it's off their shoulders and then they can continue with their work, their normal lives um then it's basically just paper work. Um it's just my it's my experience that it takes months not weeks.

Ja so it's more a process with inside the university that's long rather than the thing.

And it's a new process but Fredericka can tell you about that.

I have interviewed her again but I do to these interviews I've picked up one or two other questions I'm going to refer back to once I've completed.

Ja. Um well off the record it's not a completely optimum system it's usually not you know, it fits into the whole ambit of duties you have to do.

Ja

So um it just goes into the pipeline of the department as well. The department sits not every day um and this committees adhoc and that's you have to get them all together at the same time so.

42:27

At what stage do you decide if then the RPL is conducted for advance standing or for access? Or is it the candidate's discretion? Or what he wants?

What do you mean access, advanced standing?

Look here, largely we, if someone comes here he could say look here I want to have access into S2 it's so I don't really want to complete S1 so I want to start lets say ahead or advanced standing you get specific credits for certain subjects.

~~Ja um that again ja, sorry, the moment I print to that machine it freezes the first time I print in the morning I can print but after that it freezes~~. (Speaking to IT technician)

Ok yes of course the candidate tells us what they want ideally um in a case where he asks lets say he's one subject short of the Btech, then I'm not going to say do an RPL for a Btech and we'll let you into the masters and let Btech slip, either do that course or in Carelse's case where he specifically asked for a recognition of a measurement technology course, and he's a measurement technologist by um profession and he's done short courses at accredited um universities in measurement technology ja then there's a very good academic track record almost and proof that he's complied with the specific um outcomes of that subject. In this case I told him yes lets do that lets rather go and get you credit for that subject and then you have the Btech. It is always the risk if you give him just uh what's the term you used? If he doesn't complete the Btech would you let him into the, what's the term you used

Access

Access ja, then if he doesn't make the Mtech for some reason he has nothing. It's not as if he can, I say have half a Btech and half aMtech lets just give you the Btech at the end of the day. So there's a risk um I'm very hesitant to just give a student um access into the next programme I have one coming now in January and that's going to be an interesting one, he has a national diploma with years and years of engineering experience now he wants to go into masters.

Ok

Um I I've I will be very hesitant I told him between it doesn't matter what your work experience is are if you go from a diploma to the Mtech even though the RPL may give you access to the Mtech it's going to be hard for you and if you don't make it you still end up with a diploma after 2 years so that's a biggest risk for me I've never pushed for that, I've always looked at students maybe just needing this subject or projects is a good one, because projects is easy for me to see yes this guys spent 10 years in a management almost position um well not just management but going through all routes of a projects, in that case yes I'd rather ask for that subjects to be given to him, um those are all my RPL's so far I've not experienced the one where the access.

Ok

38:56

But there's one coming in January I'm not sure how it's going to pan out, I'm just not sure for me, I'm not a supporter of it.

Ok. With regards to the tools you've used now, you mentioned that you do, they do presentations um that you conduct interviews with the candidate, they create a portfolio, is there any other tools that you would use to assess a candidate? Or that you have used so far?

No those are adequate, I mean you look at the CV the CV is not just on his person it's about his work experience and his academic track record, that's very important and the portfolio which usually is a huge file um and then the interview and presentation um I mean we've toyed about the idea of hypothetically if there's somebody that wants for instance measurement technology then they give him an exam to write um or a test um if there's doubt, in the cases we've done there were no doubt that this guy actually exceeds or at least meets the requirements based on these tools, so we didn't have the need to employ more tools.

Do you use some type of tool, you made mention that you would give them the outcomes of lets say the subject and then he would base his portfolio on that um is there a method that you use where you cross reference his portfolio to the outcomes or um does he have to

Like to a mark scheme almost.

Ja a mark scheme or?

No it's not that formal.

Not that formal. And let's say for instance in some of the subjects um in some of the outcomes ….. you can't see it's clearly met by the POE, is there a % that you would look at or would you just say is it judgment or?

36:59

Oh no, that specifically those instances will be um dealt with in the interviews because he maybe just omitted it or maybe it's a serious deficit or deficiency um that you address in the panel. I haven't come across that but that's that's what I've been the process.

That largely covers the assessment process. Next is the thing I want to ask you about is language? In the electrical trade we use colloquial terms like insulation we would insulation resistance tester would be the right thing for testing a cable, but the people say we mega the cable, but meggar is the name brand of the instrument, well if you're assessing a guy at a interview and he uses those types of terminology that's not standard terminology from the institutions point of view and that, do you accept those, that terminology?

I will not, but it also depends on the level I only look at the post graduates and I would definitely not take a guy that's just off a trade. You have to I mean you have to your grammar and your communication skills must match um the phase that you're entering into. So um I didn't come across that, I've had wonderful RPL's unfortunately……. (35:35) of this discussion. But no maybe at S1, S2 level yes you may be able to point a blind eye but but.

How much assistance do you give the candidate at the initial discussion with them to develop the POE?

I other that a phone call where they ask certain things there's no formal procedure I've as I say I've had very good ones so then the first document he sends me is actually a very good one um I've not had a need to really ur go with them through all the processes or support them that much.

Earlier you mad reference to that you had candidates with say 10 years management experience and that and those are the type of thing you look for, so is there a specific period for lets use for example ….

As I must just clarify that I'm I'm looking at people whose come from in in from technician to technologists to managing, he's gone through all the production phases. If it's just a manager from day one then of course there's the serious lack of technical um immersion into a project.

But do you have a set criteria, do you actually say if a person comes here when lets say 3 years um as a technician and 7 years as a manager you wouldn't accept it or if he comes here with 1 year as a technician and 9 years as a manager, is there like a ratio that you'd look at? In that regard>

A sliding scale? No I think we we look at the outcomes one or what is the competence you need and then we tick them off on basically if you talk about course accreditation look at the course outline, our course outlines are quiet elaborate I don't know if you've seen INSTITUTION's outlines?

I have looked at the one for projects industrial projects.

Ja I think that's probably the most elaborate of them all, but um the generic things are all there and so whether you say 7 years or 1 year I mean in the interview we will see can we tick it off I mean you can't work 7 years in a management position and not really optimally manage so, not this about years it's very difficult to quantify, you've got limits, I give you this.

So it's very much a feeling in a sense?

Ja it's probably a feeling it's it's it is subjective but it's the subjectivity of at least 3 people and now 5 people so what we have now is the HOD, a convener um depending on whether it's the Btech or the Mtech there will be a convener of that, and then the specialist in the department that we co-opt um so you know subjectivity almost disappears um it's not always been like that I mean we started out with smaller groups, not necessarily bringing in the expertise but that was long time ago I mean I think that this process has matured to a large extent it's not subjective so

Ok.

They also don't give a mark I mean it's you either have it or not. So um you can't give a mark. Almost like a PhD offense.

Ok with reference to (shows item in POE) I don't know if you can remember this …?
Eh when was this?
It was 2009 I think 2008 / 2009.
That was before last year. This is my handwriting. It was 2007
It was 2007 ok.
It was just when I started.
I know when my base from which Fredericka selected portfolios because there's not a lot of people that come through the process, a lot of people start but they don't finish it was very small.
Ok
I've just got some questions with regard to the POE if you don't mind? It's very generic questions so.
…. Never going to remember ami?
31:09
Um largely for this POE and um I think it would appear would you agree with me
Can I just print Candidate e um?
~~Policy.~~
~~(The drivers must be loaded again)~~
~~Ja I had a similar problem and they installed a new anti virus and it improved.~~
~~It's calibrating, it goes through calibration, we can stand here for hours.~~
~~Ok what's the question and let me think about it?~~(speaking to IT Technician)
Ok actually I want to look at with reference to thing the RPL tools that were used for this candidate
Ja
I know your report largely reflects a portfolio interview and the Btech results. Ok that's what the report fact in there. Now I mean did you use any other tools? Can you remember, cause largely it was in your report um
Oh here it is this is the one I wanted to print out. No I can remember that one it was me and Mr.Kallas and Tom. It was uh a thorough interview and a presentation ja the remarks that we refer to in the Btech is the marks supporting the project that he wanted.
I want to know how much impact considering RPL is looking at a lot of RPL in the pure sense hey looks at the recognition of learning other than formal institutions. Ok um how much impact do Btech results have when you make your judgment call?
Uh it is good (laughs) obviously then obviously it will have a positive effect on me because it just means that he has that academic acumen that I want remember this guy can now go into a post grad, so be careful, yes you can't just these are not skills you pick up normally but just working experience um I look for instance I would have looked at math's I'm not quiet sure what his results were but there are a few pointers math's is one projects usually is a pointing or terming mark of that I look at when I allow the person into post grad so I always sit in the back of my mind this guy is going to get a Btech and he will be able to go into the masters with that so it will probably have been different with a diploma going towards Btech I've I've not experienced any of those I'm not involved in the diploma so not shying away from the answer or question.
Ja no it's fine
But he's not determining obviously RPL is different you you look at the broader perspective but we did that in the panel interview but it was a nice to have to have seen that he's done well in the subjects that he did um again I had that luxury of looking at his results because I've always my RPL's have always been where they've sorted wanted just one last subject but due to work conditions they don't have the time so um if it was just somebody with a diploma like I'm going to have now in January there's nothing to go on um on a Btech just he wants to jump um a degree um so I'm not sure maybe you you'll get a better position to guide us and how do you deal with those? We've never dealt with any of them, not in this department
it is this is that my understanding is that that exit level qualifications can't be RPL'd now for me, your diplomas are exit

Btech is also RPL
JaBtech would mean your exit qualification and your Mtech ….. so there you could RPL certain certain portions of it certain subjects but for the whole level I would have thought not.
You can only RPL one subject he has seven already.
Ok
He just gets the 8th and then he gets his degree, so it's not completely giving him the degree, RPL'ing the whole thing we're only RPL'ing on subject, this subject. And I'm not sure on actually what the policies these days are hey. I think there's been a change in the …… from senate.
There was I think the policy speaks about you cannot RPL more than 50% your policy um and also there's there was talk with Fredericka about the residency clause um for awarding qualifications somehow if that if you award a qualification you wouldn't necessary give that person a certificate if 50% of the subjects was not done at the institution as well so I still want to clarify that with her cause that was
24:26
No no that's true um ultimately the um ja I think the DOE subsidies link to where you get most of your courses so yes if a student comes in but this is now recognition um what is the word this is not RPL this is basically recognizing a subject is done at another institution and we give an equivalent you can't give more than 50% there ja and that's not called recognition of I'm not sure what that process is called now.
So again back to your candidate that's coming in now he's done 7 of the 8 subjects?
Ja
Ok. You've RPL'd him on the one subject and now he's going to go straight to the Mtech, but he won't
No he gets the Btech
He gets the Btech. Oh ok and then he would go to the Mtech?
Yes because we've RPL'd this is something different actually it's not where we give him a standing of going into aMtech we give recognition for a subject bases on the RPL process.
Process
And that's always been accepted now I don't know what the currant procedure is I haven't done the a RPL this year at all. Maybe you know?
No I'm, there's like I said I've got one or two issues I want to clarify, even then I would be very hesitant to give advice on INSTITUTION's policies at the moment
Laughing
No but that's actually a question I need to ask um is am I still allowed to give an extra level subject to a student based on the RPL procedure? I'm at a loss
Ok. Two more questions with regards to the portfolio. How do you determine, I know you talk about evidence and that but and you said just now quiet a lengthy portfolio but how do you know how much evidence is sufficient with RPL? Because
Again you look at what's expected um even with our students writing exams you only examine them for 3 hours, is that enough? Well you as a lecturer know what to ask um to broadly cover the aspects you think is sufficient and it will always be like this as well with ……. At the level and the breadth of the technical and project management skills, did he manage people did he manage staff time, did he manage money? Under technical those are the broad issues, when it's clear then yes of course but all this is checked in the interview.
Going back again. Then
But what's enough? Ja
What's enough? Again there's more like a there's no definite guide line, it's more a feeling? Or judgment? Not a feeling it's more a judgment that's made by the senate.
It's a bit more, ja it's a judgment but it's a bit more objective than a feeling um as I say we have to look in these cases where I've RPL'd subjects we have to look at what is required for that subject, if

he gave me this as his final year project almost like all my other students do when I still pass him the format is different and everything and ultimately yes it's whether he's RPL where he comes from within is the same set of criteria that I apply in my mind. But it's not a formal procedure. Not a formal assessment criteria let me rather put it like that. It will be nice to have a tick sheet.

Ja. Mark memorandum.

And at the end of the day I think each RPL is so individual.

Ok um now is there at the moment is there any subject or course and that type of thing that you feel that you would not be able to RPL a person on?

No

Or a specific skill – math's?

Laughs. If I can just quickly think math's, project is a easier one inverted coma's easy one to RPL because there are soft skills and there are hard skills and a mix of them. Industrial project you have to spend time in industry. I did so RPL projects maybe better than …… at the university but no math's I think has will be a difficult one for me.

So if someone comes in here now and says I want to be RPL'd on math's would you then give him an assessment in other words a test examination or would you say no come and do the subject?

Oh um well maybe he's done the informal math's course. Maths for instance isn't something you're going to pick up just by walking around um so yes in that instance if he wants to be RPL'd for that um or the math's forms part of the RPL that he requires then yes I will either give him a written test or um if he fails that we will obviously say he must do the course.

And the percentage for the written test would it be the same as what the candidates would have to achieve?

I don't think there's a policy but I would assume that's natural.

So in other words if you used lets say past examination paper and the pass mark is 50 then the candidate would have to achieve the 50% status as well?

Yes, the test will be different I mean we can't fail a student on one exam only um but that's for normal students in the programme um if I use it as just a single assessment um yes then I would give him a bit more time but he has to pass.

Ok. And with regards

I will give him the course outline and the content of the course um as well beforehand.

So this is maybe a bit more out of the box but if you look at different types of different places provide different knowledge we've the institution knowledge we've got work place knowledge and things like that, what knowledge is best suited in your opinion for RPL assessments? What type of knowledge, when you look at a candidate ok going back to one of the other questions maybe asked in a similar way, when you look at the candidate, what type of knowledge do you see as being more important when you RPL him? Knowledge as again in the workplace or

17:19

You mean experience or theory?

Experience, theory.

~~Thank you so much. I don't think it's going to work laughs. I've had IT here before. Um ja I can honest,~~ (speaking to IT Technician) I think one of the um considerations would be on what level and what purpose he wants the RPL. At the end of the day if he's successful it doesn't really matter what his purpose was to start out with I ask him what do you want to achieve, if it's to stay in the company but you need a better pay yes then academic knowledge is probably not as important. If your purpose of the RPL is to come to my post graduate programme …… of the Btech I'm going to red flag it.

I'm going to priorities, so it's difficult um without I think you must assess where the student wants to go, if he's already a manage in a successful company he's not going to come to his post graduate studies, he's not interested in academic enrichment so then yes you look at the other practical skills.

15:56

Is there anything, ok you said math's already so we're largely finished with that?
I can only think of math's which I can always highly theoretical um you know math's is probably the best and physics we don't have physics but I would assume that math's and physics and chemistry the uneventful subjects.
Are subjects you wouldn't RPL?
Look electrical engineering if a guy builds up on circuits in industry he probably knows more than our students of what can go wrong and how to fix it, but the fundamental math's based courses and signal processing as well um I will definitely test through um some kind of evaluation.
15:03
The last section I want to ask is just some of the with regards to some issues with debates within RPL um
Debates?
Ja well um opinions, thoughts those type of things. And then
Am I going to be quoted in your thesis?
Well we, look here there will be quotations but with reference to names and institutions and that will be omitted
Ok.
Um if your already said largely if I understand correctly I don't want to go through and ask you the same question, what's changed since when you did …..Daries and um today that you now have a panel that decides RPL as opposed to when you did this there were just 3 people now it's a 5 people panel.
Ja look I was always what's changed I was always uncomfortable by the fact that the 3 of us decide whether the student gets a degree in essence without actually going through the course, so um although it was always me and HOD plus senior lecturer and maybe a subject expert is um I don't know, we had the policy but that's all, we didn't have the support from Fredericka to maybe discuss these nuances that you've now mentioned. So no the thing has been formalized um I think the process through faculty office through senate and …… the fact that she manages the process I think is now better. Because it was always a departmental function you know to drive the process, but we actually just there to evaluate the evidence. So it's much better in terms of procedure that the candidate goes to her she submits the request plus all the documentation to me, she's also on the panel and then she takes it to you know to senate and wherever the approval must come from, so it's much more professional I think it's much more no not transparent but it's more controlled. Um and from a quality perspective yes that obviously impacts the positive thing, um not that I say these have got poor quality but um there weren't checks and balances really um you have to regulate to ensure that everybody buys into …….
And the next thing is do you, would individual assessors differ in the manner or complexity of the assessment they choose? When they determine
Say again
When you look at individual assessors, lets say yourself as apposed to a different assessor, if you had to assess this POE do you think you would have come to the same outcome that you have?
Well that's why we have a joint discussion afterwards, because again we've been fortunate that everybody agreed but yes if I had this case he would have flagged his concerns and we discuss it. Um it's not a matter of he gives a mark, I give a mark and that person gives a mark and we take the average, if anybody fails it, everybody must unanimously agree that um there must be a unanimous decision at the end of consensus um I would assume, it's not taking the average of 3…….
11:28
Ok um the RPL assessments you've conducted so far, I think you've said 3
Ja with the 4th one now.
4th one now. So and they've all been given some type of accreditation or subject or that type of thing?

One subject
One subject.
It's literally where they've just needed one subject to complete a course but where their work environment has changed so much that they said they will never be able to do it and um it's gone through senate so, it was acceptable up till very recently, I'm not sure if there's been a change in heart.
And largely do you think the candidates benefit from the RPL process?
Monetarily and professionally yes they do. Um ja
Would you, given that and this is probably a hypothetical question, given that the POE's and the candidates that you've already assessed, but lets say for instance you started doing RPL candidates on a more regular basis, and maybe they were coming short in maybe one or two skills, would you look at changing your course programmes to develop those skills or support their learning further on or would it always be the fact that you don't meet the criteria re-do the whole subject?
Oh you mean just bits and pieces?
Bits and pieces
It's hard to say it depends on what those skills are, you know sometimes the skill is only facilitated by the whole process um if it's just solving skill yes of course go for a quick soldering course somewhere and bring the evidence um on my level …….. level I don't think we can just take one skill out I think they're all integrated so it's either a all or nothing approach. It will be a concern, maybe there's a deficiency that's a concern, but that's a concern will then be traded off or assessed against the others um I don't know it's not a question that I can Answer. Answer, I think that's going to be very specific. I don't know in principal if I have a problem with that to ask a guy you know to improve on certain bits and pieces it's part of the learning process and the end of the day you must give him recognition of that learning so where that learning comes from I can give him input and say just do this and this and this if he does it at INSTITUTION he might as well just register for the whole subject he's going to have to anyway.
08:20
In your experience what type of learners do best in the learning programmes at INSTITUTION? Is it adult learners or learners straight from school?
Are you talking now not RPL?
Not RPL
Just students within
Just students within, cause I'm looking at it from a point of view is that generally speaking persons that will come here and ask for RPL are learners that already have work experience.
Yes
Those are the people so when if you're looking at it just the very basics which type of learner would perform better with at INSTITUTION is it the learner straight from school or is it learners with work experience?
Obviously those with work experience, but we don't always have that luxury
Ja, but
Most of our students come from directly from school.
And what do you think gives the person with work experience the edge over a student who's possibly straight from school?
I think it's a maturity um I think for many of them coming from a very protective environment at school being spoon fed I mean that's a cliché I don't know if it's really true, but you know the circumstances and now you take them many of our students are from the Eastern Cape they come here for the very first time to a big city they're out of their support mechanisms um you know they have to fend for themselves and buy their own food and stuff so from that point of view I think it's a frightening experience for many of them to go from rural towns to a big city and university, where you're one of 30 000, you're not special by all means and we as lecturers don't have the time to

spend individual time as you know as sometimes is required, there are no systems where we um we are putting systems in place where we actually have to identify students in need not just academic need and how we deal with those, but ja I think it's a maturity um also students that's gone through a year or two's work I'm assumed they're more focused and where they want to go um and they've seen that yes if I apply my mind and I improve myself academically if I grow then my chances outside becomes better. I think they're also more hungry and focused and mature I mean hungry for learning not hungry for physical …..

Ok, this is probably one of the more difficult ones to ask and things like that but what

Well the previous one was pretty difficult – laughs

Oh no people's always wary when you ask them what's there opinion? But what is your opinion on RPL?

I think it's a valuable tool in the right instances that's better – laughs – that's a b

No ok. Be honest. You're being diplomatic they are valuable in the right instances. If you could, would you stop using RPL as a process?

No

No

No, there's definitely cases where a guys done so much, much broader than what we expect actually in house, not to give him that recognition is just not it's devoid of any um rational. So we as an academic institution must give recognition not just to internally generated knowledge but also other knowledge, you have to recognize it, if you don't recognize it we don't' say we're actually saying is his not there and the only truth or knowledge that's out there is what we develop internally um so no I think but that's why I say if it's right applied, if it's managed right, I believe INSTITUTION is managing it correctly now um it's very valuable.

But a lot of the old traditional institutions um and very much the universities and that I know you before you guys were a technicon and that, but they have this perception that we generate knowledge and our knowledge is more important lets say than the next level of work. Now the formal universities like UCT and Stellenbosch and that

Um umum I used to lecture at Stellenbosch.

Ja, but had a different opinion about the knowledge that's been generated out of the um the technicons and either less of an opinion about the knowledge from the colleges and that. So there's always that

You mean from industry?

Ja,

That's why I safe guarded myself it it's applied correctly and it's important to know for what purpose this RPL is, you can assume it's life I know you can't do a contract within saying well if we give you the RPL but you don't have to stay in that line, um but no if certain academic knowledge is less important than practical knowledge for RPL's and other way round I know the I must say I'm hesitant to RPL somebody into a post graduate course, I don't know what I'm going to get now.

Ok

For the same reason that Stellenbosch will be hesitant because those are skill that you I don't have any experience with people picking up skills in the work place that puts them in that mind set to do post grad studies. There are of course exceptions.

Look here I

I have some of the brightest physicists and entrepreneurs of yester year didn't have proper or formal schooling so um I will objectively look at the RPL coming to me who had a diploma but he's very mature and his got lots of experience and and innovations so you have to trade it off. Single answer I cant' give you there.

You know when they started with RPL a lot of the debate was that RPL would suit the trades best, in other words electricians, plumbers, cause we largely teach outcomes based education, we teach

skills, we teach people to do skills, but you know when I started to identify a site my initial thing was to go into one of the colleges and that

…FET……college

Ja, or inside a training centre and lets see how you do your RPL? Other than going into my own workplace and looking at them because it's very inwardly focused and I'm part of the RPL process in my workplace, but you do calls and you go do a search on the internet, you find oh there's a lot of RPL policies all these institutions got lovely RPL policies

But they don't apply it.

Don't apply it, so why not? So my thing is then part of my my I'm looking at this as my thesis was, why aren't they applying it and why if it was so ok for the trades in a sense, why the trades are not applying it, why are the higher institutions which were always very protective of their knowledge prepared to do it in certain cases and the other people aren't?

Ja

So that's something I'm looking into

JaINSTITUTION's probably midway between where you would expect more RPL"s and where you would expect less um but we certainly don't have a flooding of RPL"s I mean I see one a year.

But are the students aware of it?

Ja I think they are. I think they are especially now with the RPL office um and the website and everything maybe we can expect more. It will grow ja

But um laughs, I don't know if I've given you any concrete answers

No that's fine. Thank you very much for that. And um would you like me to send you once I'm finished my theses send you a copy.

Yes that's that would be

Appendix I:Working with the data after sifting